

CONCETTA THE CORAL GIRL

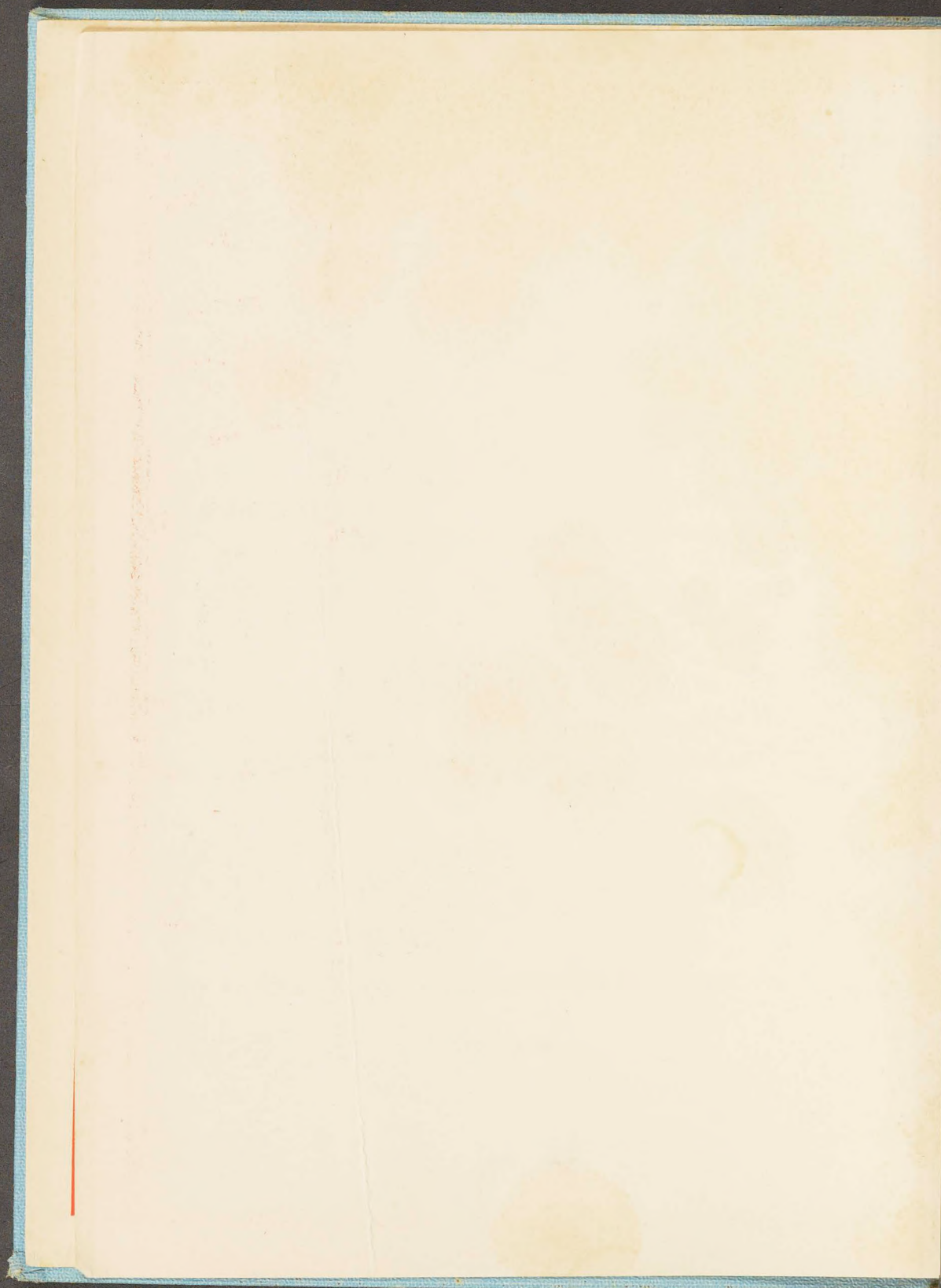


VIRGINIA OLCOTT

THE
HENRY POLISSACK
COLLECTION







141

Charming



"'BEPPO, YOU MUST TAKE ME TO THE FOUNTAIN' SHE PLEADED"

Spokane
Bliss
JUL 19

CONCETTA THE CORAL GIRL

BY
VIRGINIA OLCOTT

ILLUSTRATIONS AND DECORATIONS BY
CATHARINE SMITH



NEW YORK
ALFRED A. STOKES COMPANY
MCMXXVIII



"BEPPU, YOU MUST TAKE ME TO THE FOUNTAIN" SHE PLEADED

SINKANKAS

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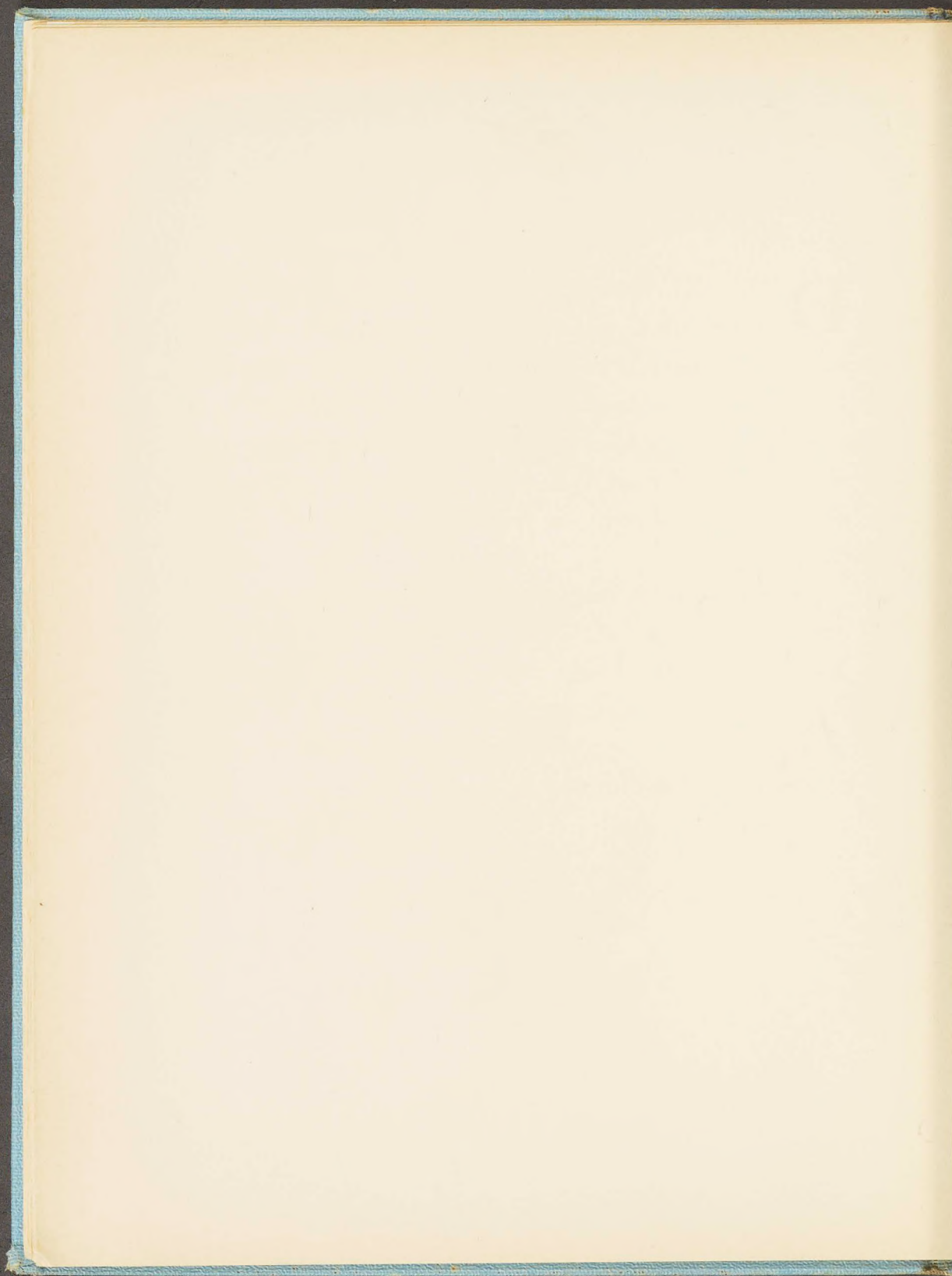
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To my aunt,
HELEN HUDSON FISH





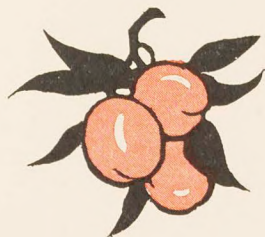


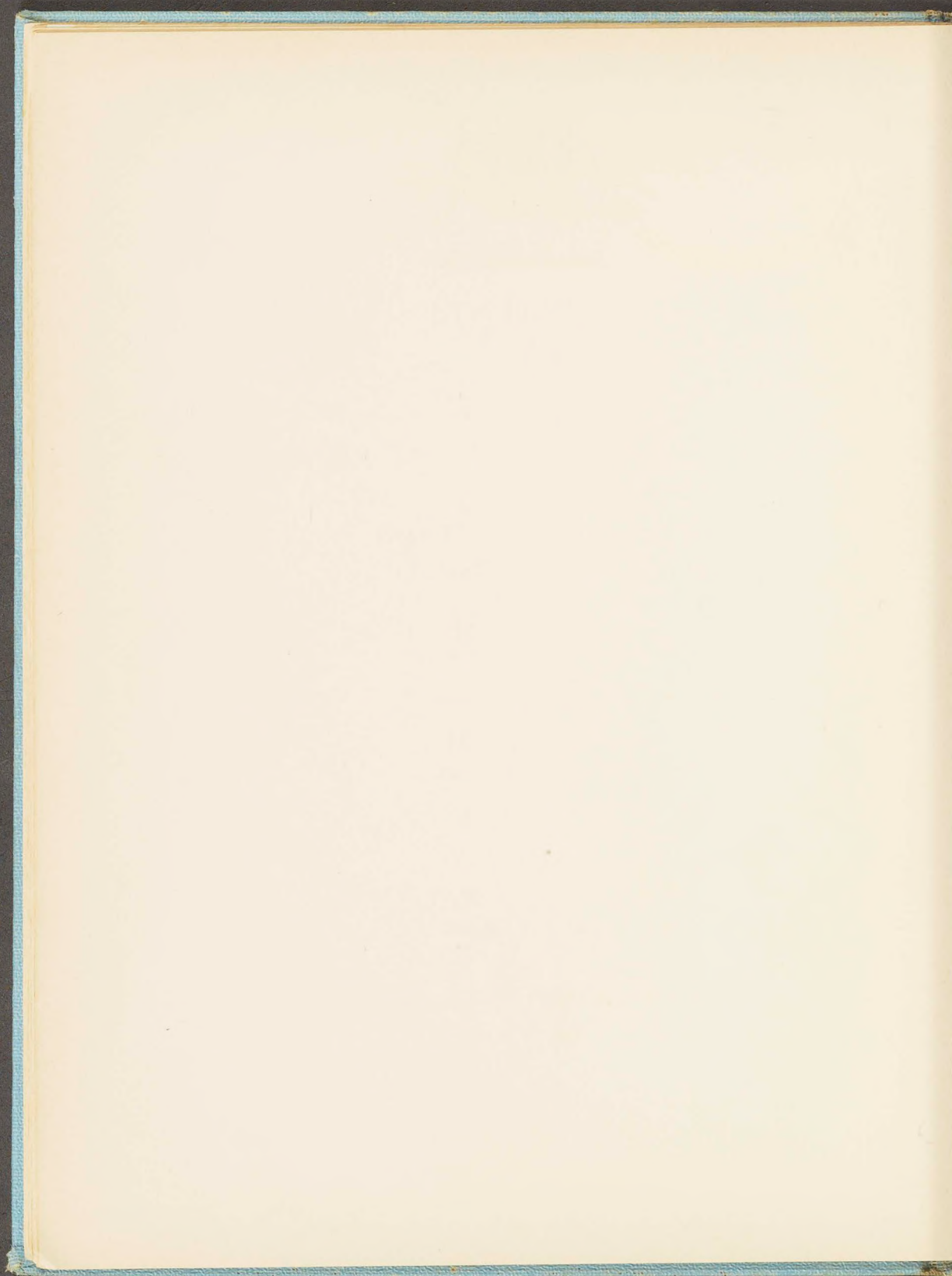
FOREWORD

DURING the years of my social work among Italians in America, I have learned to admire their many sterling qualities. The Italians' warm hearts, domestic ties, love of children, courage, impulsive generosity, friendships, and love of beautiful things, are most striking to one who is permitted to get close to their lives.

My sojourns in Italy and Sicily have strengthened this admiration. And ever since my stay in Taormina-on-the-Hills, my recollections of that charming spot have been so delightful that it is a pleasure to weave some of them into this story for our children.

—VIRGINIA OLCOTT







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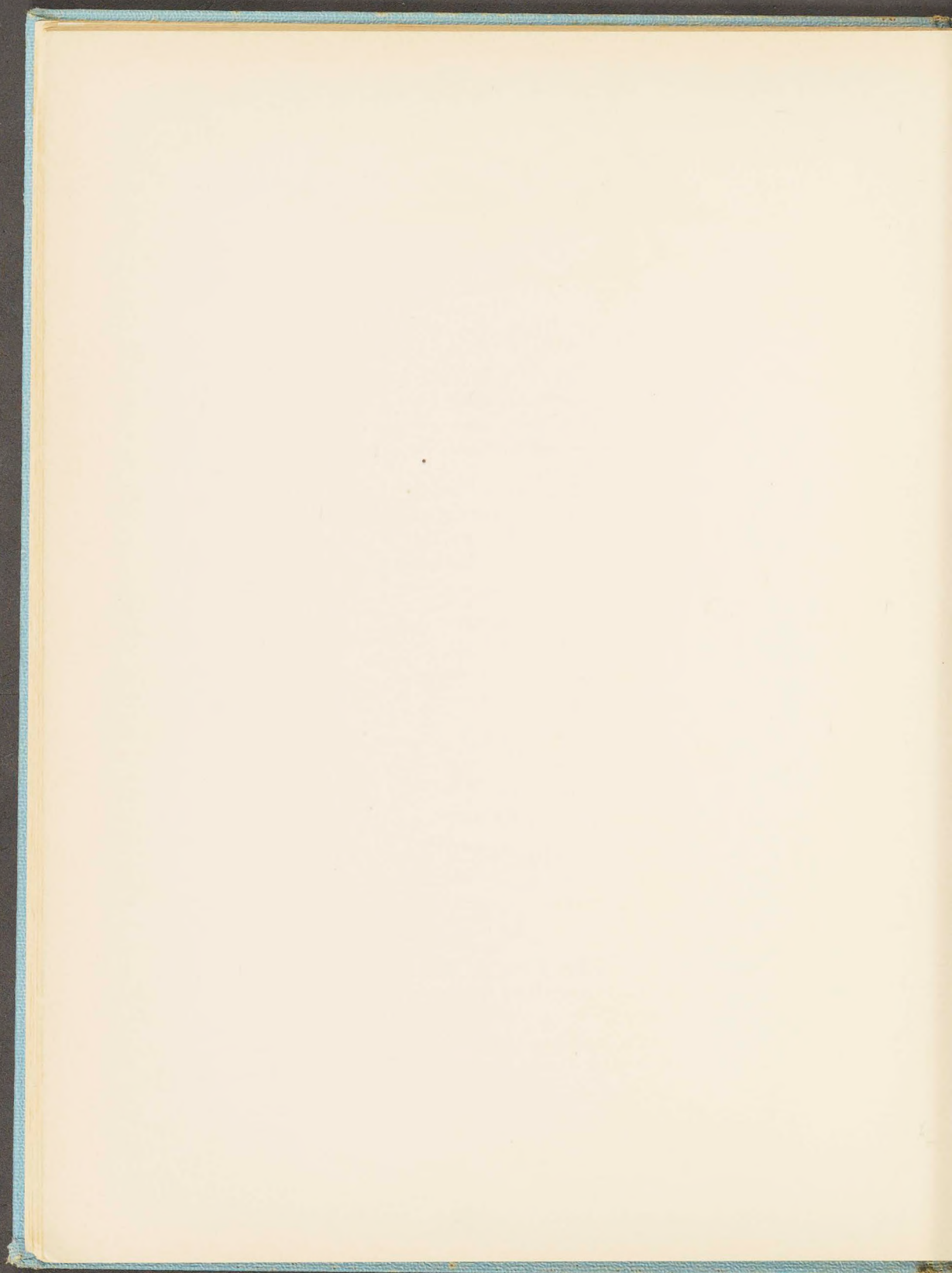
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SICILY

Land of apricot and olive,
Girdled by an azure sea,
Graced with golden lemon-orchards,
Is the Island Sicily.

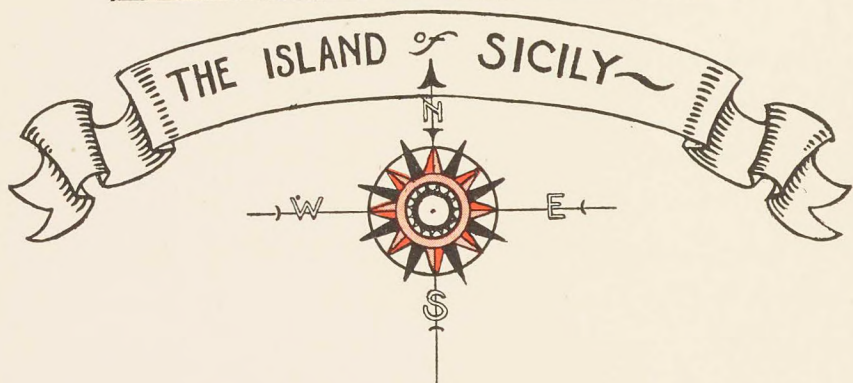
Here are vaporous mines of sulphur,
There are meadows bright with wheat.
Terraces of almond-blossoms,
Drop their petals pale and sweet.

Rose-red, snow-white Mongibello,
Etna Mountain of the Sea,
Flaming in its crimson beauty,
Guards the Island Sicily.

Still are standing ancient cloisters,
Still the old-time fountain springs,
Here the temples in the valley,
There the city of the kings.

In past ages, Greek and Roman
Came, a fierce and war-like horde,
And the beauty of its cities,
Fell before their fire and sword.

Goth and Arab, French and Spaniard,
Ruled that island of the sea.
But today it rests united
To the Kingdom Italy.



TAORMINA-ON-THE-HILLS

BEHOLD the Island of Sicily, on which Taormina lies! Taormina, in the long ago, was the ancient city of Tauromenium. Many peoples in those olden days conquered and ruled the city. Phœnicians, Greeks, Romans, Carthaginians, Vandals, Arabs, succeeded one another as rulers of that once renowned city on the mountain-side, that age-old city on Mount Taurus in the Island of Sicily.

In 1860 Sicily joined the government of Italy. Today in white-walled Taormina we see the Black Shirts, the young men of the *Fascisti*, for Mussolini governs Sicily as well as Italy.

Although Sicily is an island, one can go from Naples in Italy to Messina in Sicily by train. The journey is a long one, requiring an entire day. The train from Naples carries one into the very shoe of Italy. Look at your geography, and see the picture of Italy on the map.

TAORMINA-ON-THE-HILLS

How interesting is that journey! Constantly the train is passing through tunnels of rocks; then it emerges into the clear sunlight by the silver sea. Castles, towers, dusky olive-trees, and the distant Calabrian Apeninnes greet us as we pass. Scylla's ancient rock, the Whirlpool of Charybdis, are a part of this magnificent scenery. The Whirlpool has not been visible for hundreds of years. When you are older, you will read Homer, who tells of "Mighty Charybdis" sucking in the waves of the salt sea.

At last we reach Reggio di Calabria! We cross the Strait of Messina on a ferry, but we still sit in our train. Soon we reach Messina, the harbor city, lying low on the Sicilian shores. And from there we travel about forty miles on a train to Taormina—town of golden fruits—town ever watched by snow-clad Etna—beautiful town near the Ionian Sea where our little Coral Girl lives.

THE CORAL CHILD

You have seen a coral necklace,

Yes, I know!

That is so!

You have seen the coral earrings,

Bright and gay,

Red and pink and milk-white coral,

Dainty as a flower-petal,

You have seen them all about you,

Every day!

But come and see a bit of coral,

Pink and white!

Pretty sight!

Come and see a piece of coral

That can speak.

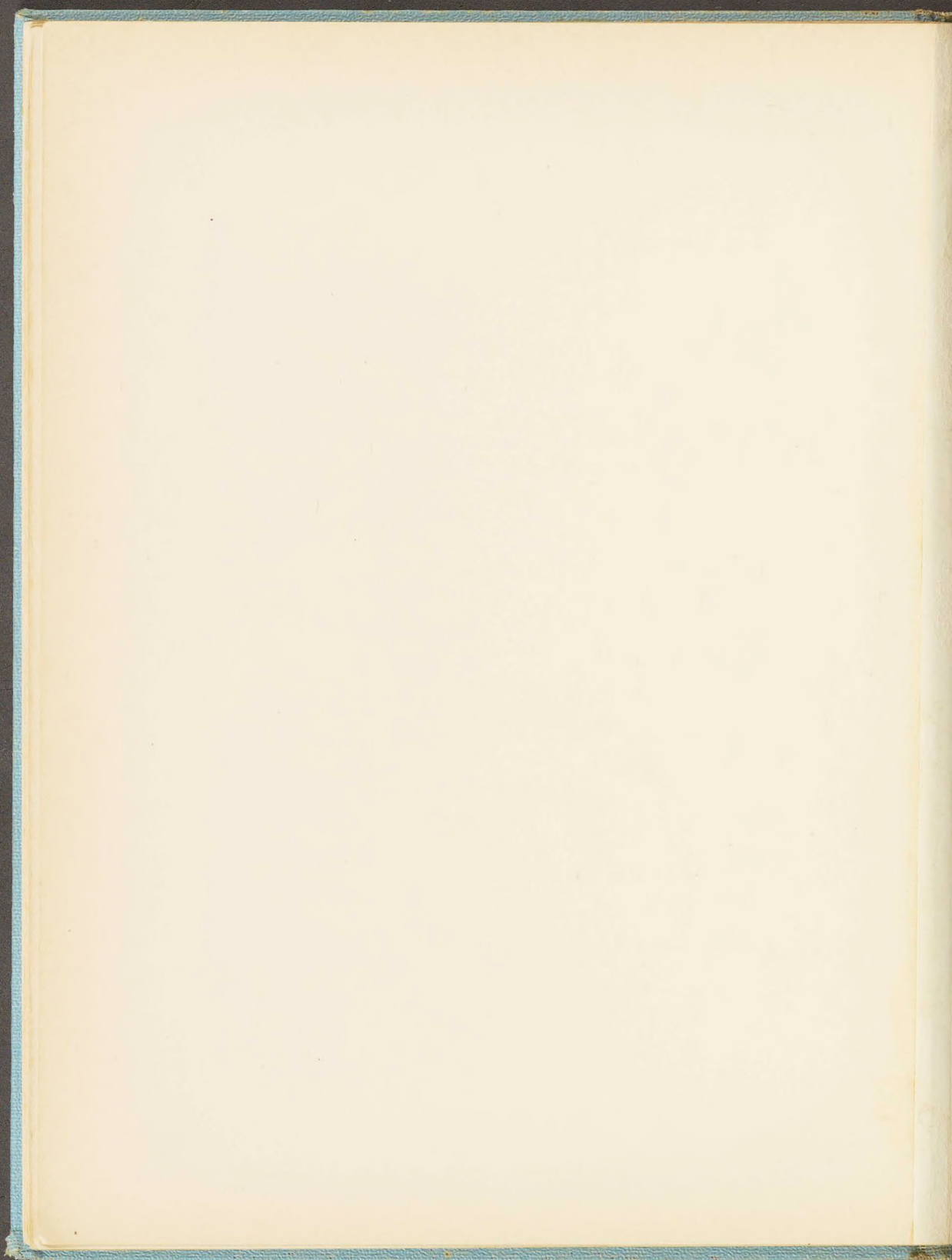
Come and see a Coral Baby,

With her hands and feet of coral,

And a bit of tiny coral

On her cheek!





CONCETTA THE CORAL GIRL

I

THE NAMING OF THE CORAL BABY

WHEN Concetta was a week old, Brother Peppe was five years old. And it was he who named the new baby.

It happened this way:

The baby was lying in her white swaddling-clothes on the low bed in Nonna Giulia's bedroom. Round and round she was wrapped in the *fascia*, the cotton bands in which Sicilian mothers wrap their babies from the very hour that they are born. Only her pink face and pink, pink arms could be seen.

Peppe was used to sleeping with his grandmother. That day he stood by the bed, looking with dismay at this new Thing that had suddenly come into his house.

What was she doing on his bed? What right

had this pink Thing to be in his home at all? There was both interest and wrath in the boy's black eyes as he looked at her.

"Nonna!" he cried, "is she a doll? Is she made of cloth all through?"

His grandmother did not answer. So he put his own small fingers timidly on the tiny waving fist of the baby. The wee hand opened and grasped his fingers. Then Peppe's anger lessened. She was not just a doll after all, at least not an ordinary doll. The small pink Thing was alive and warm and wanted to play just like himself. That was interesting! And then a more surprising thing happened.

"Oo-oo-o!" A funny gurgling noise came from Concetta's wee red mouth.

"She talks! The pink *bambola* talks!" cried the boy.

Nonna Giulia was preparing the bath. She knelt on the stone floor by a brazier, and held the water in a brass dipper over the fire of glowing almond-shells that burned in the low brass bowl.

She was busy, and was very deaf, so she paid no heed to the excited child's voice. But Peppe was too astonished at his discovery to keep the miracle to himself. He darted across the room and, pulling the shawl from his grandmother's head, called in her ear:

"The pink *bambola* talks! She talks!"

"Take care, *prezioso mio*," warned the old woman. "Don't you see the fire?"

But she did not say a word about the wonderful discovery he had made. She simply wrapped the shawl once more about her head, and began poking the coals with a little shovel.

Nonna Giulia always wore that green and red woolen shawl, from February to December, in the days of mists and cold rains, in the days when the hot sunshine flooded the long street, and the apricots and olives were blooming. Peppe understood that it was a part of her—just as her small eyes were a part of her face.

Still he was not to be daunted by either her deafness or her shawl. Louder he shouted, and



"‘SHE TALKS! THE PINK BAMBOLA TALKS!’"

firmly he tugged at the green woolen fringes on her shoulder.

"Come! come! Nonna! The pink *bambola* is talking!" And he caught her hand and pointed toward the bed.

His grandmother quickly laid the dipper and shovel on the stones. She thought that something had happened to the baby. She followed the boy anxiously to the bed, where the little one lay contentedly waving her hands in the air.

"Little Dove! Little Dove!" murmured the old woman, and caressed the small head.

"No! no! She is not a dove! She is not a doll! She is—all pink!" Then he stopped, very much puzzled.

He felt that he had to make up his mind just what she really was. And as he thought, he could remember only the lovely corals in his father's shop.

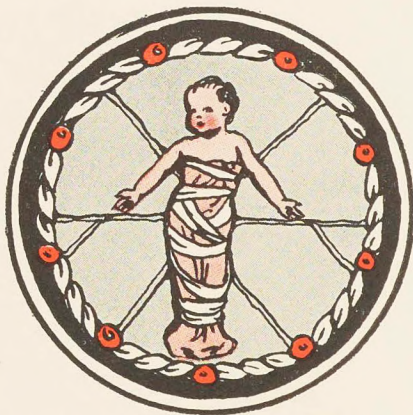
Pink—all shades of pink were the corals; pink like the almond blossoms in the *padrone's* garden, pink like his roses and geraniums. And Concetta looked like them!

"She is a Coral Baby, Nonna!" He danced up and down as he pulled the old woman's skirts.

Nonna Giulia was full of wisdom. She knew it was true, so she nodded and answered:

"Yes! yes! Carissimo! She is like the lovely coral that comes from our beautiful sea."

And that is how Concetta became Corallina—the little Coral Girl.



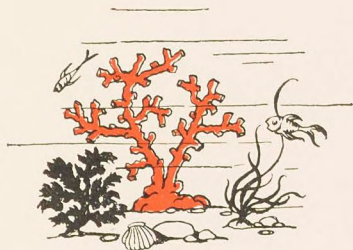
THE CORAL OF SICILY

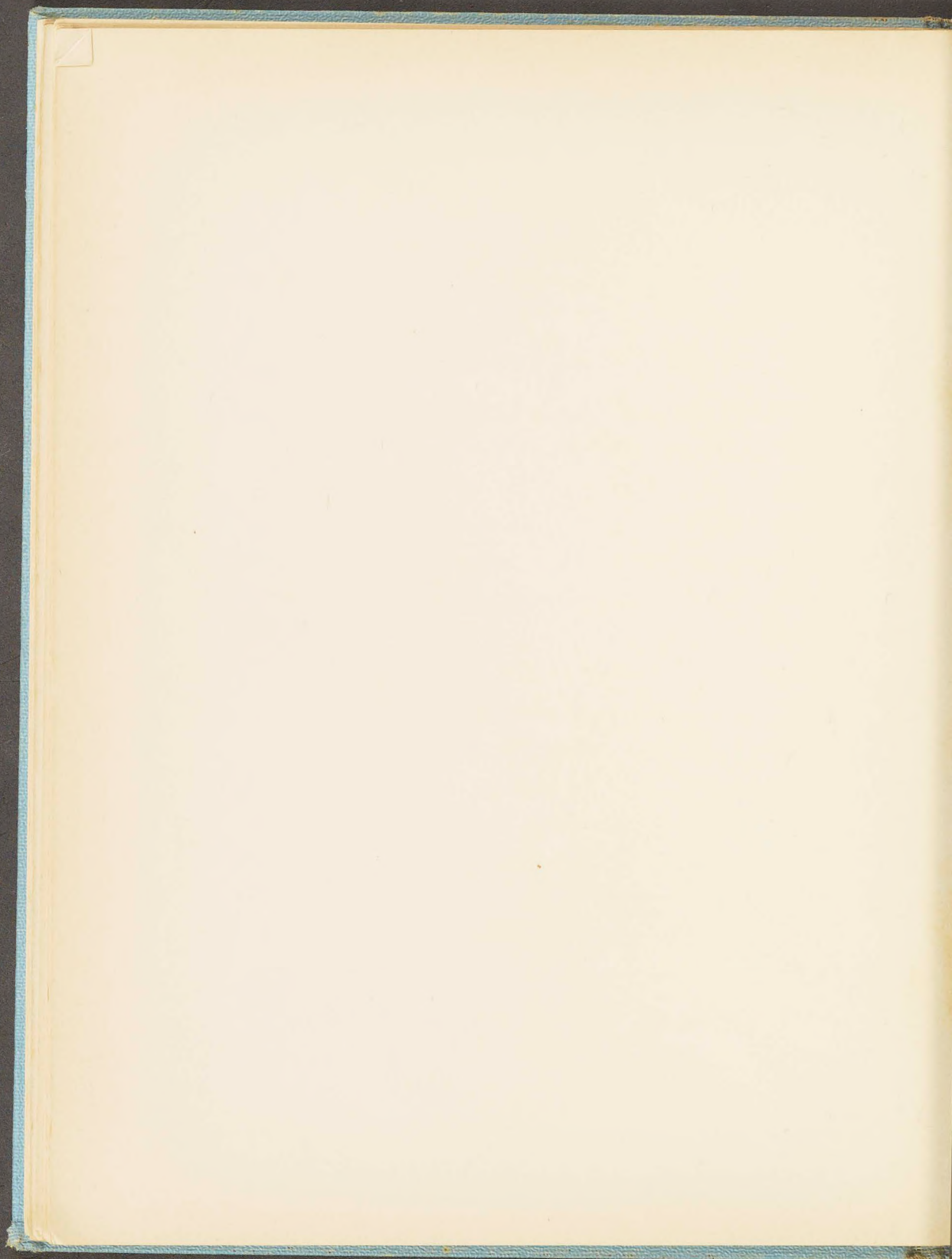
Coral!
In the deep water
Near Sicily!
Rock-bound its home is,
Tree-of-the-sea!

Coral!
Borne by the breaker
Up to the sand,
Dragged by the fisher
Onto the land.

Coral!
Crimson and rose-red,
Animal-tree;
Pink like the sunsets
Of Sicily!

Coral!
Necklace of coral,
Fair coral ring;
Gem-of-the-water
Fit for the King!





II

THE CORAL-SHOP

ALMOST eight years passed. Concetta was changed from a Coral Baby into a Coral Girl. As she grew, the all-over pinkness faded; her face became brown like ripe olives. But the lovely pink of the coral gleamed from her round cheeks, and coral-red shone her merry little mouth.

Peppe and Concetta lived in a jewel-shop, alone with their father and Nonna Giulia. The pretty, dark-eyed mother had died when Concetta was still a Coral Baby.

The shop-room, where the jewelry was displayed and where the people from the hotels came to buy trinkets, was like a fairyland to Concetta. It was her delight to watch her father make the jewelry, cut the silver, and set the pretty stones in the necklaces and rings. Al-

though there were yellow topaz and fiery opals and blue turquoises in the trays, the stones that pleased the child the most were the pink and red corals that looked like tiny rosebuds among the other gems.

She never grew tired of asking in a piping voice, "What is the name of these, Padre?"

"Coral—Corallina!" Mastro Innocenti answered always.

"What is their color, Padre?"

"Pink-and-white, like my *bambina*," Mastro Innocenti answered always.

"Just like me!" cried Corallina, and the happy game was over.

Mastro Innocenti was a jeweler in the town of Taormina. Taormina has only one long street; that is the town. It is a street of little shops and gray walls; and of gardens filled with rose-vines, geraniums, and heliotropes.

Mastro Innocenti's shop was near the Hotel Vittoria. The hotel stood tall and gray, while nestled by it was the shop, little and gray, like a tiny shadow. The *padrone* and the *mastro*

were friends. They had been neighbors together and had lived happily in the city of Messina, until the fearful time when that city was shaken by an earthquake. Towers and churches, palaces and humble huts, were thrown to the ground, and hundreds of lives were lost on that terrible day. But the young friends had escaped unhurt, although their parents and brothers had died in the fires that followed.

With nothing but the peasant clothing that they were wearing, the two friends had left the ruined city. And after three days of wandering they had come to the little town of Giardini. Still farther they had traveled the long white road that led up the mountain-side, until they reached Taormina. And in Taormina they had made their homes.

In time, one of them became the *padrone* and owned the Hotel Vittoria, while Canio Innocenti opened his little jewel-shop. And it was there that Peppe and Concetta were born.

Now Brother Peppe was learning the jewel trade. He had begun to learn when he was

nine years old, and now he was thirteen and Concetta almost eight.

"Next week will bring my *giorno*, Peppe," Concetta said one morning. She sat in the shop while her brother dusted the trays of pins and rings and gay necklaces. The jewel pieces were to be sold to the foreign visitors, who lived in the hotels and spent their time going in and out the shops buying pretty souvenirs.

"*Ecco!* my little sister has another birthday! The little Coral Girl will soon be a Coral Woman!" cried Peppe. He smiled into the child's black eyes that shone like stars beneath the shadow of her *mantellina*.

Concetta wore her small black shawl over her head, in just the way that Nonna Giulia wore her green wool one. That *mantellina* was a part of her, as were her dark curls and dimples and her quick chirping voice and red button lips.

"And Nonna Giulia is going to make—" Concetta continued.

"*Maccheroni!*" cried the boy.

Concetta wrinkled her face into a frown.

Pasta on her birthday! Surely Peppe was stupid.

"No! Jelly-rolls!" She almost danced as she said it. "And—and—cold pigeon!"

"Oo-eee!" Peppe's eyes sparkled too. The daily simple fare of *pasta* and fish vanished from his mind, and he and Concetta began to plan the birthday supper.

"You shall have its legs, Peppe! They are fried brown and crisp. I shall take the two little wings, and they shall lie on my dish so-o," Concetta crossed her two fingers, "all the time that Nonna says the blessing."

"And then, when you open your eyes, *ecco!* the wings are flown away! Away over to the *padrone's* garden!" As he spoke Peppe took a broom and began to sweep briskly, for it was time to open the shop for the customers.

Concetta stood very still, thinking. What if the birthday supper did fly away? What if those crispy wings were lost among the apricot-trees in the garden? Could she find them? What

if she had to eat *maccheroni* after all! She was almost crying with disappointment.

“Corallina!”

It was Nonna Giulia calling from the room behind the shop. Then the door opened and she entered the shop.

Nonna Giulia was lame and deaf. Her old face was wrinkled—with hundreds of wrinkles brimming over with kindness. Her eyes were as clear as a flame. Those eyes saw everything. In fact, Nonna Giulia heard with her eyes! She had no need for ears, she told her little ones. She simply watched their lips as they talked, and *ecco!* she knew everything.

Nonna Giulia was wise and very gentle. She could not read nor write. But her head was filled with exciting stories about the ruins of the Greek Temple on the hill, and with legends of the ancient priests of San Domenico.

She held a pannier, in which lay a mess of little shining trout, still wet from the sea.

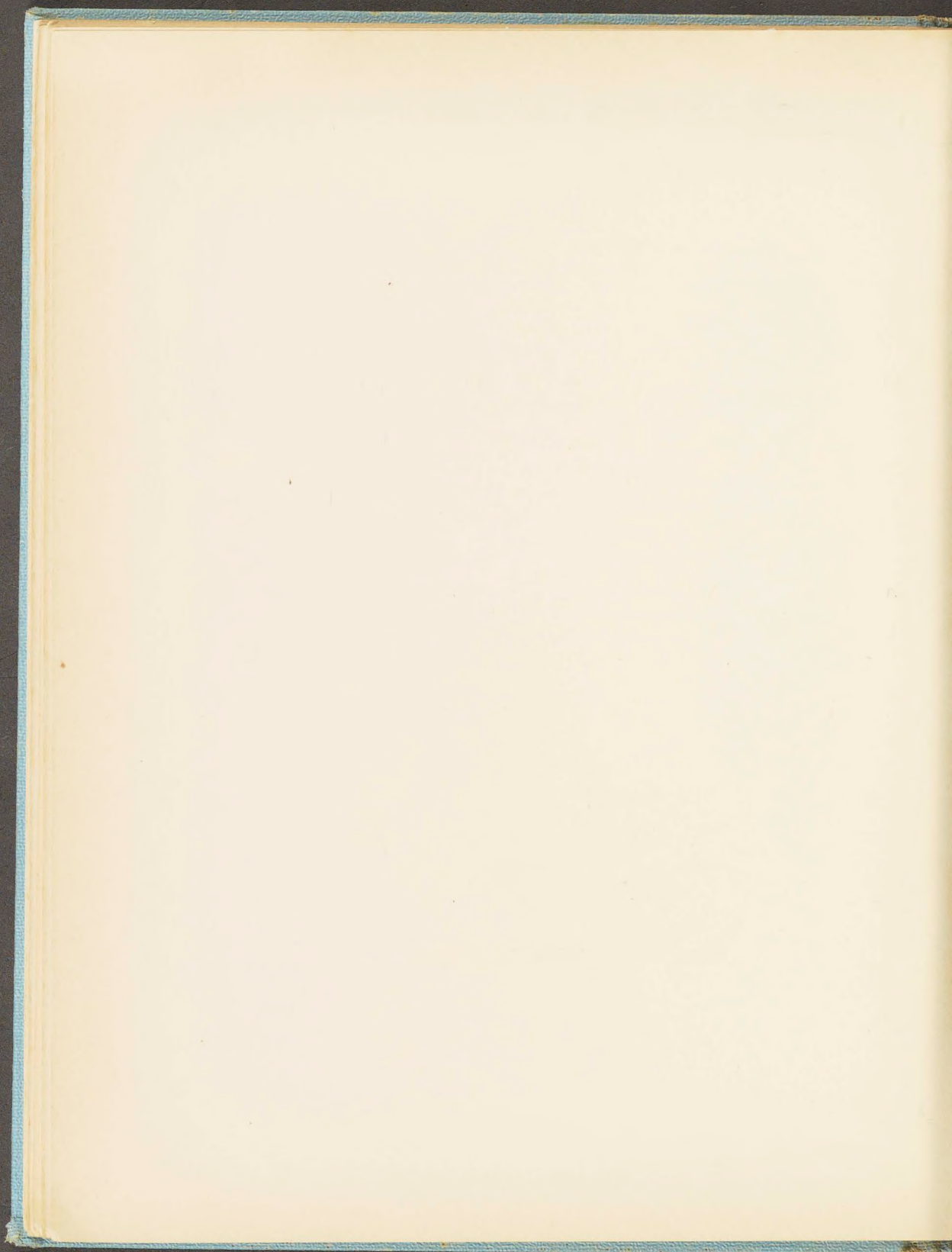
“Carry these to the *padrone*, and fill the pitcher at the fountain, Corallina,” she said.

She put the round basket on the little girl's head, and gave her a jar with several handles and many little spouts.

Concetta left the shop with the pannier poised on the top of her black *mantellina*, and the great jar in her arms.

Her mind was still busy with the terrible thought of her birthday supper lost in the trees of the *padrone's* garden.





THE QUAIN'T CART OF SICILY

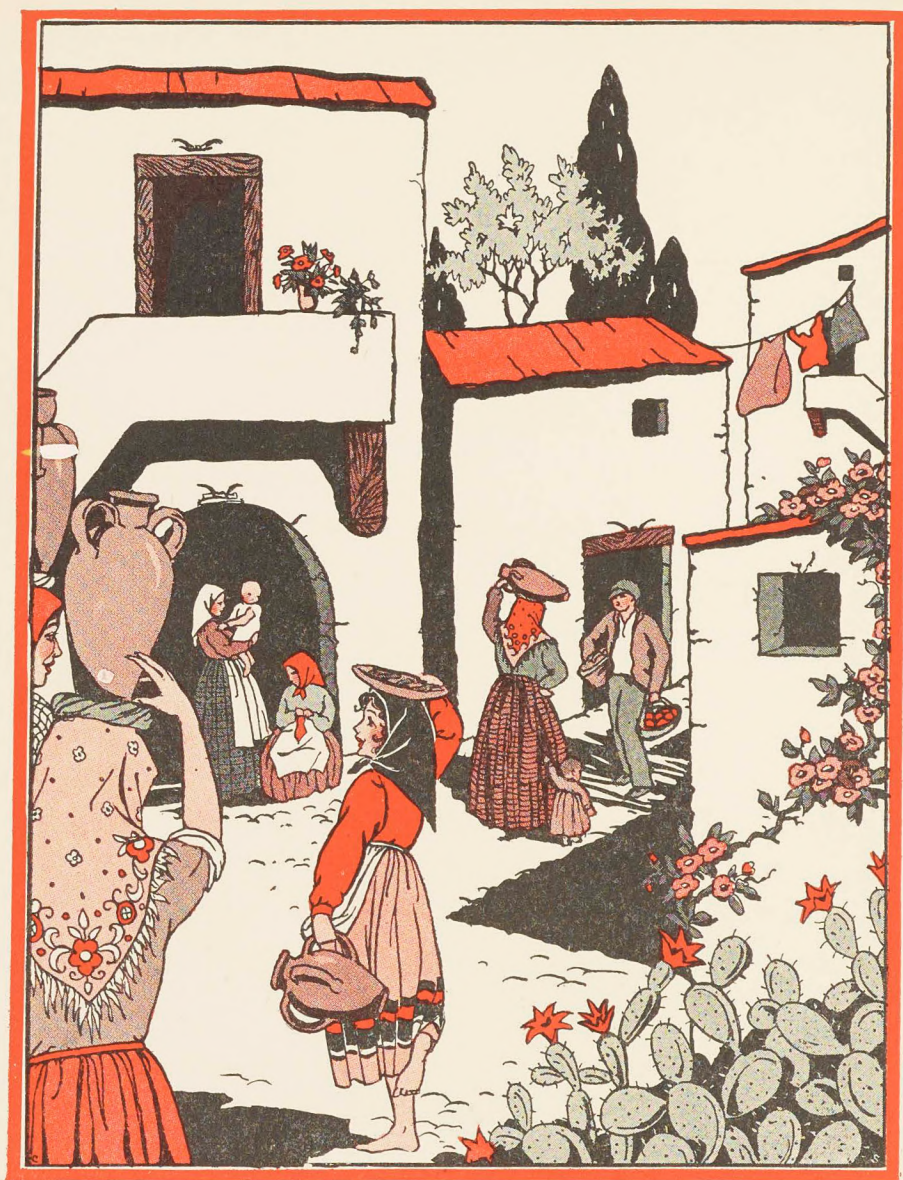
The quaint cart of Sicily
Is as strange as it can be!
With its glass a-tinkling,
And its harness jingling,
The pretty cart from Sicily!

The bright cart of Sicily
Is as gay as it can be!
With its plumes of merry red
Waving o'er the gray mule's head,
That draws the cart from Sicily!

The queer cart of Sicily
Is a story-book to me!
Painted on it's side so low
Are pictures of the long ago,
History-cart from Sicily!

The dear cart of Sicily
Is as old as it can be!
With it's glass a-tinkling
And it's harness jingling,
The happy cart from Sicily!





"THE SUN IS HOT!"

III

THE CART OF TINKLING GLASS

“**T**HE sun is hot!”

Concetta put the jar carefully on the ground, and wiped her brown face with the end of her *mantellina*. The morning sun was pouring its bright rays on the long unshaded street. The little girl's bare feet were burning from the hot stones, so she stood on one foot and then on the other, like a young stork. The basket of fish was still secure on the top of her head.

The piazza was a distance away. In that open square was the old fountain which supplied the town with fresh water for cooking and all uses in the homes.

From the low white houses, the women were hurrying to the piazza to fetch the water. They carried their tall beautiful pitchers crosswise on

their heads, and the *bambini* toddled and ran by their sides. The wives and daughters of the richer tradesmen looked bright in their gay shawls; while the poor mothers were wearing the somber black *mantelline*. All were gay and friendly, and as they passed Concetta they called to her pleasantly:

“Make haste, Corallina, or Master Sun will eat you!”

“He is nibbling me now!” called back the child, and she waved her foot in the air.

Suddenly the street was alive with a faint jingling and a clitter-clatter of brisk feet. Down the street came a bright cart drawn by a small gray mule.

“Oo-oo! It is Beppo! He will take me to the piazza.” Concetta clapped her hands in happiness.

Yes, it was Beppo, the *padrone's* nephew. He sat in his cart with his head held high in a grand manner, as proud as a peacock preening its feathers. Beppo was a fine-looking lad, but the cart in which he sat was finer still.

That cart was the only one of its kind in Taormina. The *padrone* had bought it in Messina, and had bought the gray mule in Girgenti. The cart was painted orange, and red, and lively blue. On its sides were delightful pictures of events that had happened in the town when the Romans were the rulers of the Island. Tonio the mule looked as gay as the cart. He was dressed with red braid ornaments, and with a grand breastpiece covered with bits of glass that made all the lovely tinkling music. On his head a bunch of light red feathers waved, and his back was decked with a pyramid of tossing plumes.

"*Buono giorno!* Corallina!" cried Beppo, gaily snapping his whip in the air.

Then the cart passed up the street.

"Bep-po! Bep-po!" wailed Concetta. She waved her hand and waved her foot to make him look back. "Beppo, you must take me to the fountain," she pleaded.

And Beppo looked back. No one could refuse the little Coral Girl anything when she

coaxed. Her voice held such a chirping sound, her eyes opened and shut like the quick beating of swallows' wings, and she turned her small red mouth into a coral-red button.

The mule stood quietly as the boy leaped to the ground and lifted the child into the seat. Then he put the jar on the floor at the back of the cart, and Concetta held the basket of silver trout in her lap.

Clitter-clatter! Tonio's gray feet went merrily toward the piazza.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" asked Concetta.

"To the Castello à Mare. Uncle has sent me to deliver this package to one of the foreigners who stays there," replied the boy.

The Castello à Mare was a magnificent hotel in Taormina. It stood not far from the cloisters of San Domenico, and it was there that the richest tourists came.

"Next week will bring my *giorno*." Concetta sat quietly holding the basket, but her face

was twinkling with dimples. "And," she added, "you are to come to my *festa*."

Then she remembered the dreadful thing that might happen to her birthday supper.

"Beppo! If my pigeon flies into your garden, will you catch it?" she whispered.

"*Certamente!*" answered the boy. He looked at her round, red button mouth and added, "You shall have every pigeon in my uncle's garden."

"No! no! it is not that kind! Mine will be brown and fried crisp." And breathlessly she told him of the terrible fate that Peppe had threatened to the feast.

"And if it is lost in the apricot-trees, I shall have to eat *maccheroni*," she wailed.

"There will be no trouble at all to catch those runaway wings," Beppo answered cheerily.

"I am so glad! You are older than Peppe. He could never reach into the branches." Concetta gave a sigh of relief as she looked at the boy's long legs, that hung over the crowded cart.

"*Ecco!* Here we are! Wait for me and I will carry you home."

Tonio stood still. Concetta scrambled out of the cart, and Beppo placed the basket on her head and the big jar in her outstretched arms.

Clitter-clatter! With tinkling glass and tossing feathers, Tonio and the rainbow cart carried Beppo away on his errand, while the child ran across to the piazza.

The fountain was deserted. All the women were gone home with their filled pitchers, and the sunny square was empty.

Concetta filled her jug with the cool water.

"I will let it rest here, and carry the fish to the *padrone*," she said to herself, "then I will come back to the fountain and wait for Beppo."

And off she ran to the Hotel Vittoria.



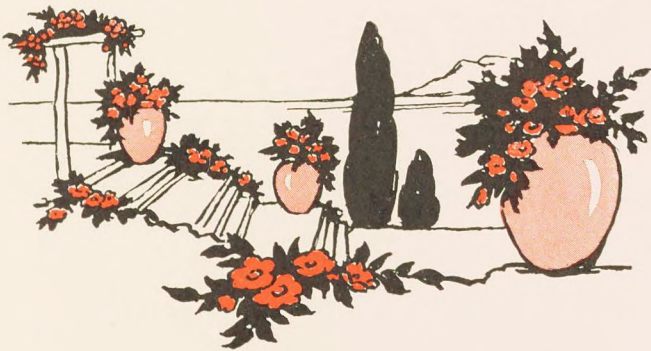
THE GARDENS OF SICILY

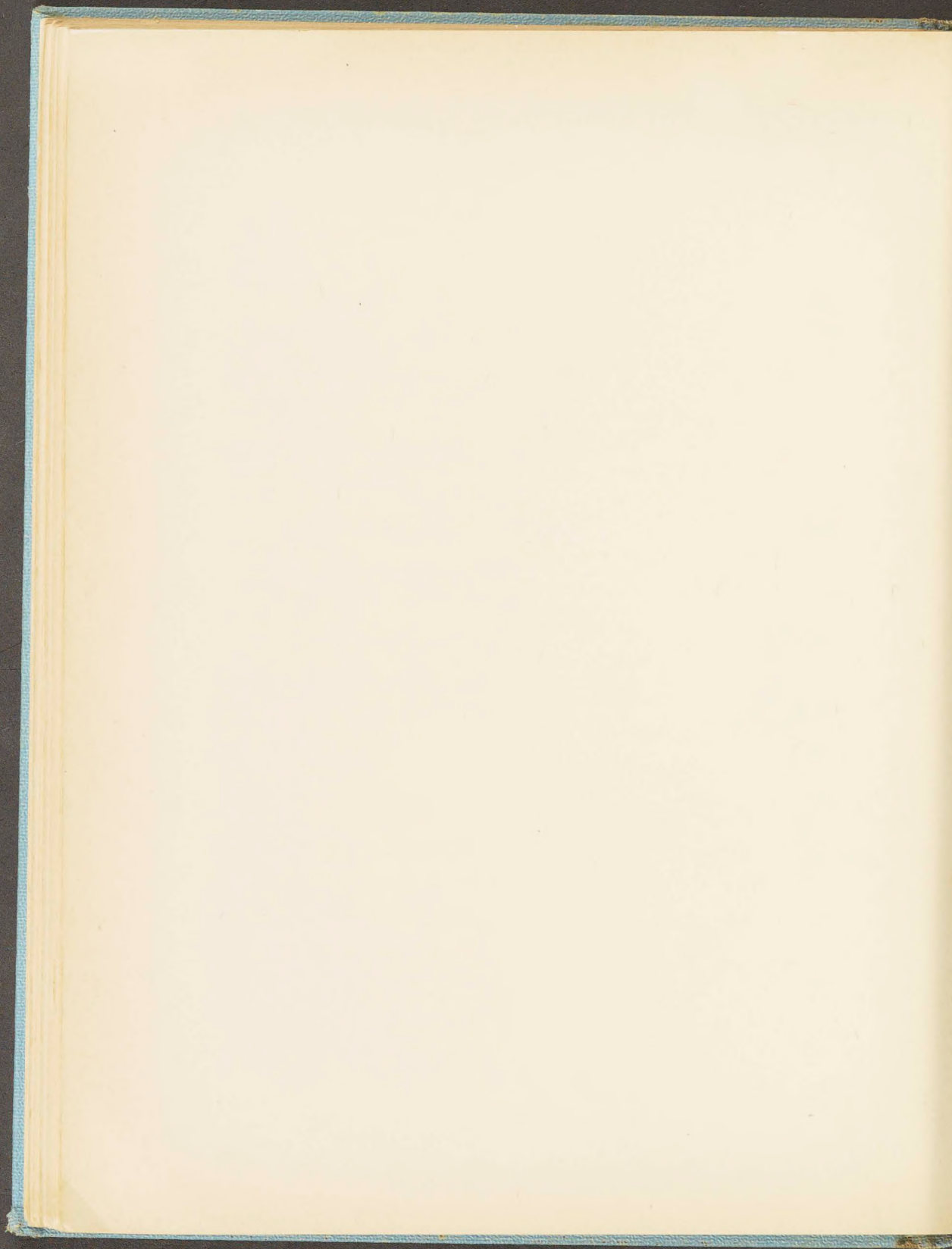
Fairy gardens still are growing,
That I tell you true!
Bright with blossoms rich and glowing,
Flowers of every hue.

Terrace rising above terrace;
Rosy almond-tree,
Lemon-grove and shadowy cypress
Falling to the sea.

And above them ever golden
Glow the southern sun;
While the swallows dart and circle,
Happy every one!

Fairy gardens still are growing,
You may trust to me!
I have seen them on an Island
In a sapphire sea!





IV

THE PADRONE'S APRICOT GARDEN

CONCETTA, with her basket of trout, danced up and down the many stairs in the hotel, and through the winding halls that led to the *padrone's* garden.

The garden was an enclosed court filled with everything! There were almond- and apricot-trees; great water-jars full of cactuses; gay geraniums; irises; heliotropes; with golden sunshine scattered over all.

The *padrone* was seated on a bench beneath an apricot-tree, playing a small reed flute. He was waiting for the *carozza* to arrive from the railway station at Giardini, with some foreign visitors who were to spend the month in his hotel.

Concetta ran to him and held out her gift.

"Nonna sends them to you!" she cried happily.

"*Bene!* Your grandmother is my friend!" exclaimed the *padrone*, pleased with the fish.

He put his flute on the seat beside him, and touched the silver trout with careful fingers.

"These will make a fine feast," he said.

Again Concetta remembered her birthday supper, and she looked up at the apricot-tree to see how high its branches were. Then she stood on the tips of her toes and stretched her arms above her head. Yes, they were high, those apricot-trees! But Beppo was tall, too, and if he stood on the *padrone's* bench and stretched his long arms, surely he would be able to reach even the tallest branches.

The *padrone* laughed as he watched her.

"You cannot reach even a leaf, *cara mia*," he said, "not until you are older."

"But I will be older next week. Do you think I can touch the top of the tree by next week?" She skipped up and down in excitement. Her

eyes were fluttering like swallows' wings and her lips were puckered into a coral-red button.

"Next week brings my *giorno!*" she explained.

"*Certamente!* Next week Corallina may reach the top of the very tallest tree in the garden!" answered the amused man.

Then a loud noise in the street and a bustling and humming of the servants in the hotel announced the arrival of the strangers. The *padrone* hastily left the garden to greet his guests, and Concetta sat on the seat waiting for his return. She was to carry the empty fish-basket back to Nonna Giulia.

She was contented now, and her thoughts were happy ones. She would not need Beppo to catch the wings. Next week she would be so tall that she could reach into every tree and find those runaway wings herself. The birthday supper was safe!

At once the bustling sounds came nearer. A servant carrying two great traveling bags en-

tered the garden, followed by the *padrone* and his guests.

Concetta sat perfectly still to watch.

One of the guests was a tall, quiet woman. The other was a girl of ten, with long braids of brown hair and a thin little face. She was dressed in a brown woolen dress. And she wore brown gloves and brown boots, and walked stiffly, like Concetta's wooden doll.

She seemed tired from the journey, and followed her mother with a frown on her white face. Soon both of them were hidden by the trees and bushes and had entered the corridor that led to the other side of the hotel.

Concetta was sorry to have them go so soon. Few children came to Taormina. Almost all the foreigners were grown people. Concetta was greatly interested in the way the little English girl was dressed. She wondered if the brown gloves covered hands as white as the girl's cheeks. She thought, too, that those heavy boots must be hot and uncomfortable.

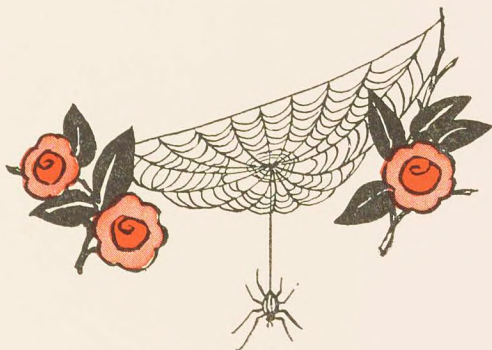
But she wished that she owned a hat exactly

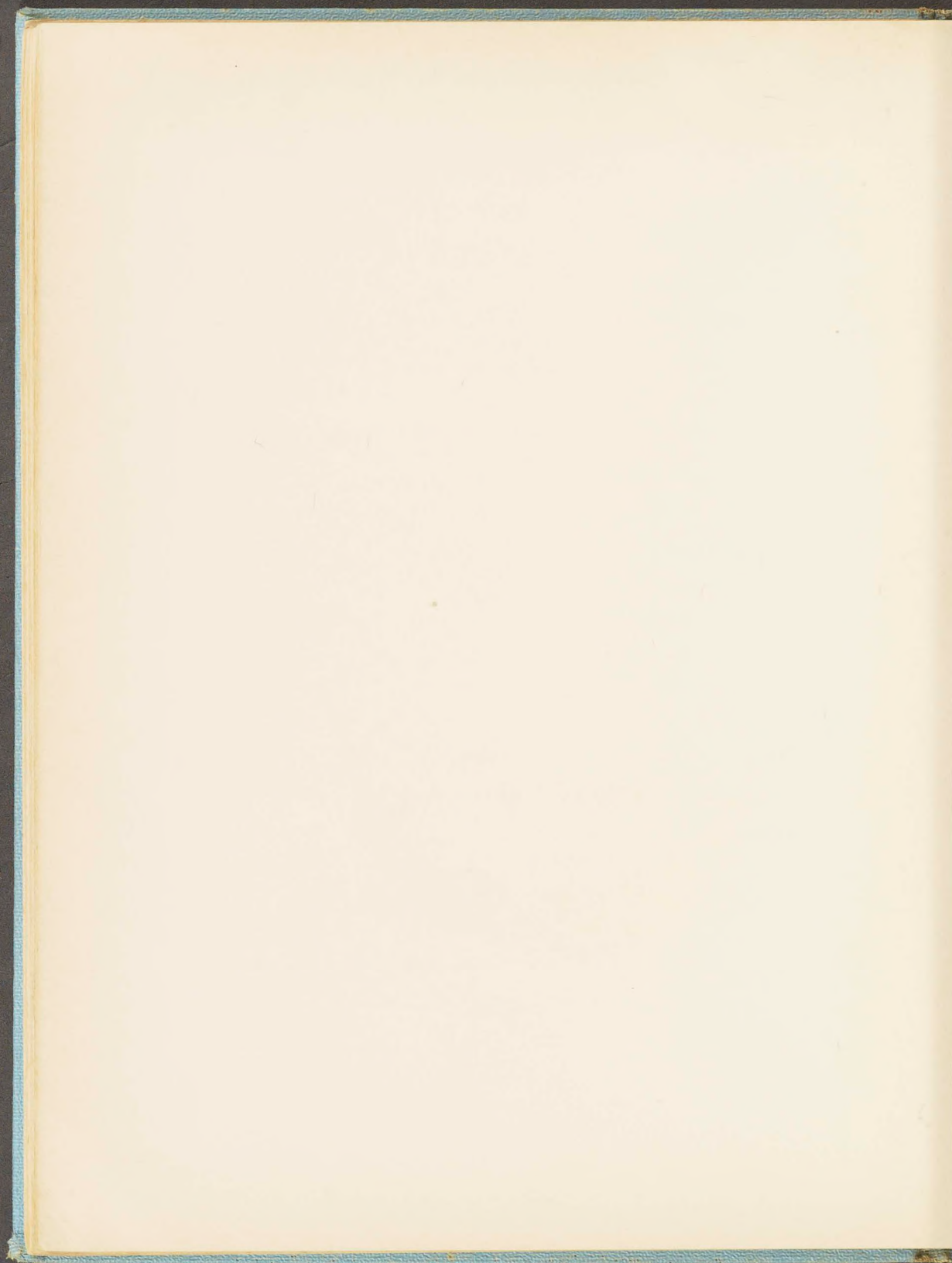
like the round straw one that the stranger wore. Concetta pulled off her *mantellina* and smoothed down her dark curls, wishing that she had long brown braids.

At last the *padrone* returned, muttering to himself.

"A little spider is that English child!" he said, as Concetta followed him into the kitchen and waited for the pannier to be emptied.

Then with the basket under her arm she ran back to the piazza to meet Beppo and his rainbow cart.





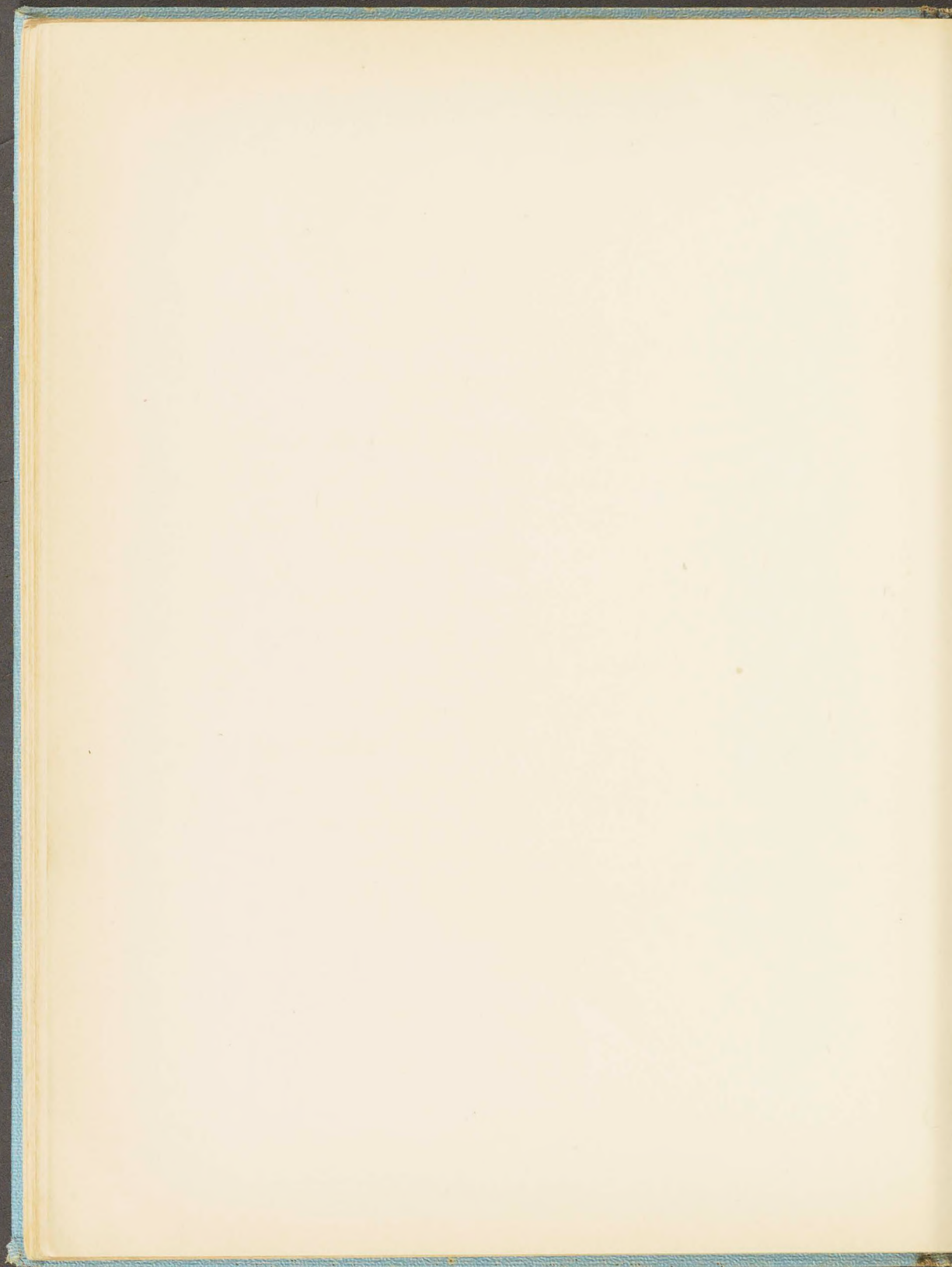
ALL THE WORLD LOVES SICILY

From great England's mighty country,
From the towns of Germany,
Do they come, the wide-world over,
To fair-fruited Sicily.

From Algeria's snow-white harbors,
From bright Spain beyond the sea,
From gay France, they come in gladness,
To sweet flowering Sicily

From the land beyond the ocean,
From the New World, strong and free,
Come they all, in rapture hailing
Coral-Island Sicily!





V

THE LACY CORAL EARRINGS

THE early morning sun stole into the little room behind the jewel-shop. Concetta sat on a small stool eating her breakfast of bread and honey. A bowl of coffee-and-milk stood on the chest near her. The chest was very old. It had belonged to Nonna Giulia when she was a young girl. It had belonged to Concetta's mother when she first married, and it was she who had placed it in the little room and filled it with all the linen underwear, and sheets, and pillow-covers. And when the time came that Concetta was no longer a little Coral Girl but a young Coral Woman, that painted carved chest would be hers.

As the little girl nibbled the bread and honey, she watched Nonna Giulia, who bustled about

with a dish of eggs and flour in her hands. The next day was the birthday, and every one in the household was preparing for the *fiesta*.

"Where is Padre, Nonna?" Concetta asked.

"He went last night to Messina to buy silver for the orders," answered Grandmother.

She stirred briskly the batter for the *pasticioti* for the birthday supper. And as she stirred she added a handful of chestnuts and sugar, and last of all, she poured into the golden dough a dish of powdered white cheese.

Concetta watched her make the dough into egg-shaped cakes.

"Uno, due, tre," Grandmother counted, as she laid each cake into the pan, until two dozen sweet-cakes were in a row, ready for the fire.

"Go and help Peppe clean the shop, Coralina," she said.

Concetta drank the last sip of the coffee-and-milk, and ran into the next room.

The shop was in order. The glass cases which held the pretty articles were polished till they shone like crystal. The floor was swept. The

small boxes on the shelf were arranged in neat rows.

Peppe sat with a dust-cloth in his hands. He was rubbing a pair of filigree earrings, fine like gold lace and set with bits of pink and red coral.

They were to be a gift to his Coral Sister, and he had made them as a surprise for her birthday.

Peppe hid the trinkets as the little girl came dancing in. But Concetta's bright eyes caught the flash of gold and saw the boy's hands carefully hide themselves behind his back.

"Peppe! Peppe! What are you doing?" She whirled and twirled about on one foot as she tugged at his sleeve.

"Dusting," said the boy, but he kept his hands clasped tightly, for the child was peeping behind to see what he held.

"Show me what you are dusting! What is it, Peppe?" Concetta held up her coral-red button mouth coaxingly.

Peppe shook his head. "It is . . . something for somebody!" He looked over the top of her

mantellina as he spoke. It was not wise to look at Corallina when she wanted anything.

"Is it for my *giorno*?" She had guessed it!

"I won't tell!"

"It is! It is! I am the somebody!" Concetta piped gladly.

"Hush, Corallina! See!"

Peppe pointed to the door, which opened quietly. The English visitor from the Hotel Vittoria and her young daughter entered.

"*Buono giorno!*" the mother said in Italian. "May I look at the pins in your window?"

Concetta darted under the broad counter, and shyly watched the lady as Peppe, with a grand manner, brought out the trays filled with sparkling jewelry.

The English girl stood near her mother. She was very quiet. Lively little Concetta did not know before that any little girl could possibly be so still. The English girl was wearing her brown wool dress, and held her round hat in her small gloved hand.

Concetta was interested only in the boots, and

never took her eyes away from them. Those brown boots were so amazing! They laced up almost to the knees and were tied at the top with small stiff bows. But the sober English girl was interested in the pretty jewelry. She had never seen anything so wonderful as those trays filled with opals and topaz and coral that Peppe was laying on the counter to show her mother.

Then the English girl saw the lacy filigree earrings, which Peppe in haste had put on the counter as they entered.

Oh, how lovely they were!

They were round like yellow moons. All over them were bits of coral set in the shape of rosebuds. Then the English girl touched them, and in delight picked them up to examine the carved flowers.

She laid the pretty ornaments against the dull brown of her sleeve, and patted it and smoothed them lovingly.

"These are pretty, Mamma; I like them," she said. "Please buy them for me."

Her mother glanced at the trinkets and laughed.

"Fancy! A well brought-up little English girl wearing earrings! Wait until you are grown, Ann."

"But I will not wear them until I am big. I will keep them to look at," the girl insisted.

"Put them down, Ann, and come with me." And her mother gathered up the package she had bought. Laying the price on the glass case, she left the shop.

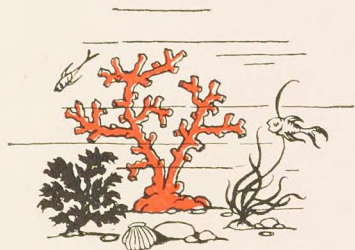
Peppe counted the *lire*. Concetta gazed with rapt eyes at the stiff brown boots. Little Ann's gloved hand tightly closed over the earrings which she still held, and she followed her mother out into the sunny street.

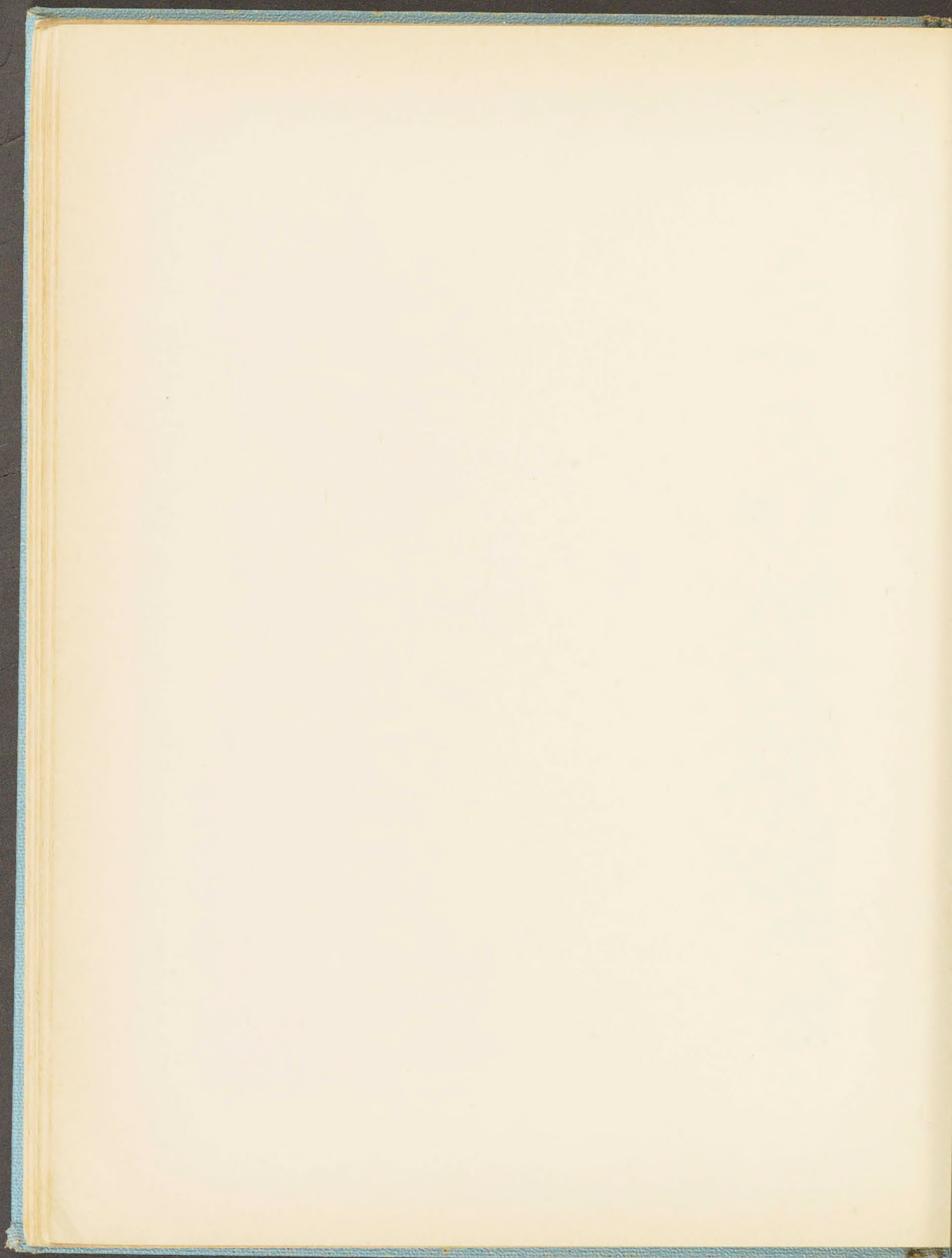


THE SEA-FLOWER

Sea-Flower! Sea-Flower!
Coral pink and red,
Growing in the green waves
In the water-bed.
Near the shore of Sicily,
Deep within the sparkling sea.

Sea-Flower! Sea-Flower!
Lovely little thing,
Giving us your coral
For a golden ring.
Making coral bright and fair
For the happy world to wear.





VI

THE CORALS THAT FLEW AWAY

PEPPE'S FACE was aglow with happiness. He slipped the roll of *lire* into the box which was kept for that purpose.

"A fine sale! A fine sale, Corallina!" he cried. "Padre will be glad when he comes home."

Concetta crept out from beneath the counter, and peeped into the box.

"Everything good happens for my giorno," she remarked.

As she said that, her brother looked at once for the earrings which he had placed on the counter. They were gone!

The boy made haste to find them before Concetta should discover where they were. He looked into the trays and into the boxes. But he found no earrings.

Then Peppe began to be troubled. Where

could they have gone? Wherever they were, they had secreted themselves very cleverly. Again he searched the trays. Again he looked into the boxes and on the floor.

Those coral, golden lacy earrings had disappeared completely.

"Corallina! They are gone! Your birthday present is gone!"

The boy was almost ready to cry. He had worked so faithfully to make the trinkets for a surprise that he had really grown to care for them himself. With each bit of coral that he had set into the gold, he had happily thought of Corallina's pleasure. How pretty she would look with the little drops hanging among her curls!

"They are gone!" Peppe kept repeating.

"My surprise is gone?" Corallina was almost breathless with disappointment.

"What was it? What did it look like, Peppe?" she whispered in a voice that was hardly a breath.

"Earrings! All coral, and gold, and pink roses!" He was breathless, too.

"Earrings!" wailed the little girl. She put her brown hands on both her small ears and began to cry, "Nonna! Nonna! My ears! My ears!" and ran wildly into the room to her grandmother.

Nonna Giulia feared that her child's head was in dreadful pain. She took the little girl into her lap, and rubbed the small ears tenderly.

"*Poverella! Poverella!* What is it ails you?" she murmured. "Wait, Nonna will make a nice soft *senapismo*." And she started to make the mustard poultice at once.

Concetta sat on the painted chest, still holding her ears and sobbing. Then Peppe rushed in and told their grandmother of the terrible loss.

"The earrings are gone, Nonna! I have searched all the shop but I cannot find them."

His eyes were filled with tears and his hands shook as he said it. And shuddering sobs and long sighs came from the little figure on the chest.

Grandmother tried to soothe the miserable children.

"*Poverelli!*" she said soothingly. "We shall find them yet, those earrings! We will look all over the town until they are found!"

"But they were on the counter; I put them there myself!" Peppe explained.

He could not understand how they could be found in the town, when they had never left the shop.

"Patience, *bambino!* They will come again. Perhaps a little angel has borrowed them and will bring them back to us," replied the old woman.

Peppe knew that his grandmother was wise. And somewhat cheered by her words, he went back to the shop and began to search once more.

Then Mastro Innocenti returned from Messina. He saw instantly the shadows in the boy's face and was aware of some misfortune.

"What is the trouble here?" he asked.

Peppe, in a few words, told of the strange dis-

appearance of the coral earrings. In haste the father went to comfort Concetta.

The little girl crept into his arms, sobbing, and Mastro Innocenti began at once to tell her of his journey to Messina.

He took from his jacket a small sack. He opened it and poured out a stream of coral into the child's apron.

Concetta touched them curiously and said: "They look like live things, Padre."

"*Ecco!* My *bambina* is wise! They are made by little animals who live in the water like the fishes," replied her father.

"Tell me!" And Concetta nestled comfortably in his arms as Mastro Innocenti, in a hearty voice, told her the tale of the sea coral.

"Once upon a time, down in the sapphire waters of the sea near Sicily, lived a tiny, tiny, red jelly-like creature. From it grew fine snow-white threads, which waved about in the blue water.

Then this tiny, tiny, red creature began to

build a hard red body for itself out of lime drawn from the water around it.

This was coral.

In time, other tiny, tiny, red jelly-like things, whole swarms of them, built themselves red coral-bodies. And they fastened themselves to the body of the first creature. They kept on building and building, until their coral-bodies, fastened one to the other, looked like a little bush with slender branches. And from the coral branches peeped the tiny, tiny, red creatures themselves, with their snow-white threads waving about them like pretty flowers.

One day a coral-fisherman dragged this precious coral-bush from its sea-bed. He took it to Messina, and sold it to a jeweler who had come from Taormina to buy coral for his shop. And what beautiful beads for necklaces and pins will be made from this coral-bush!"

Concetta remembered again those runaway earrings and she began to grieve.

"Will they look like Peppe's earrings that flew off?" she asked tearfully.

"Ho!" answered Mastro Innocenti gaily, "if those earrings have flown away, your old padre has something to take their place! See!" And he pulled from his coat a small package. "This is a surprise for your *giorno*!"

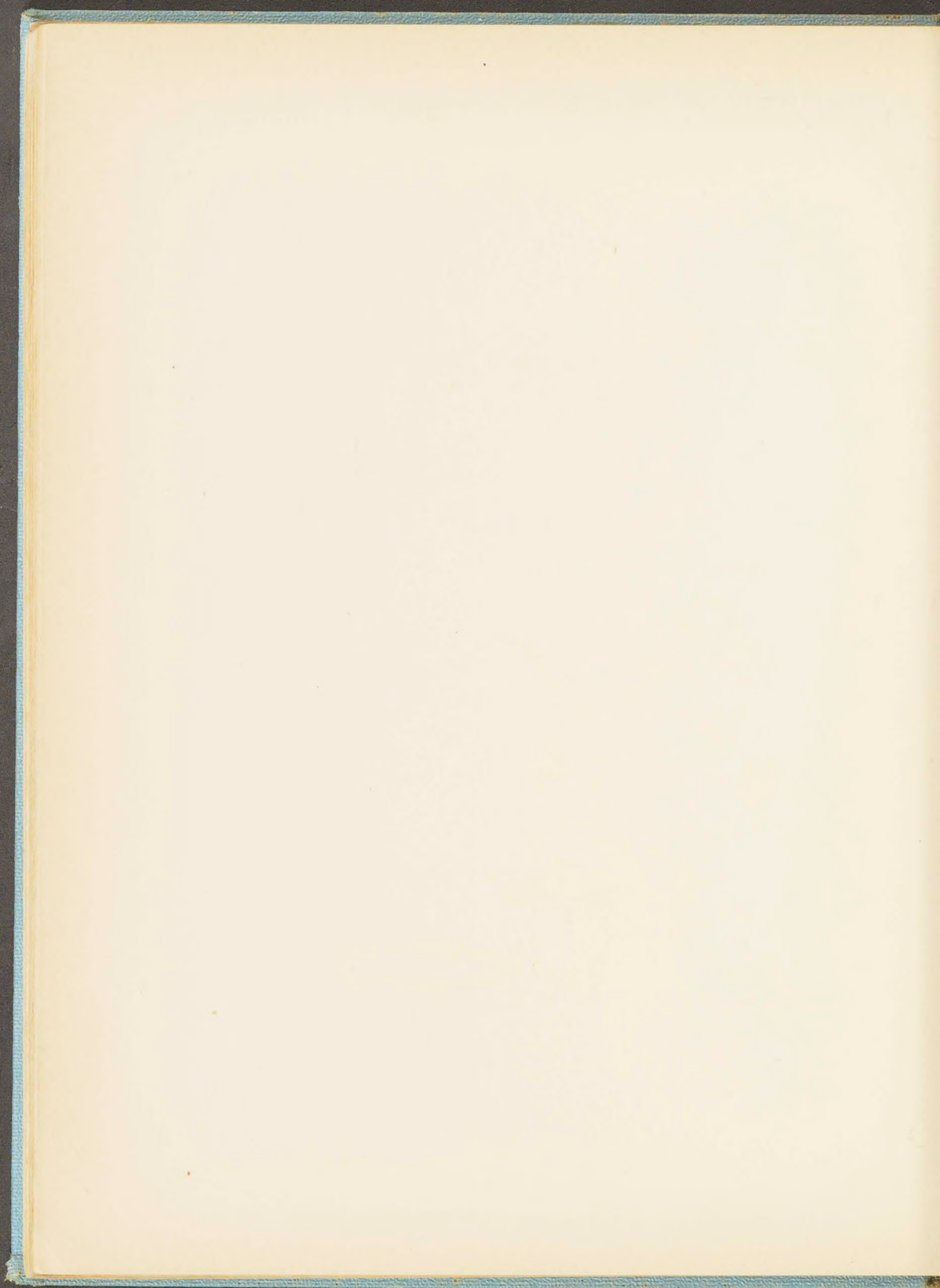
Concetta straightened herself and stopped crying instantly.

"Hold it fast, Padre," she warned, "for it may fly off."

With that she remembered how her fried pigeon-wings might go, too, for those earrings had really run away. Perhaps they were all going to the *padrone*'s garden!

She climbed from her father's lap and pulled her *mantellina* about her head. Then without a word she ran out of the shop toward the Hotel Vittoria.



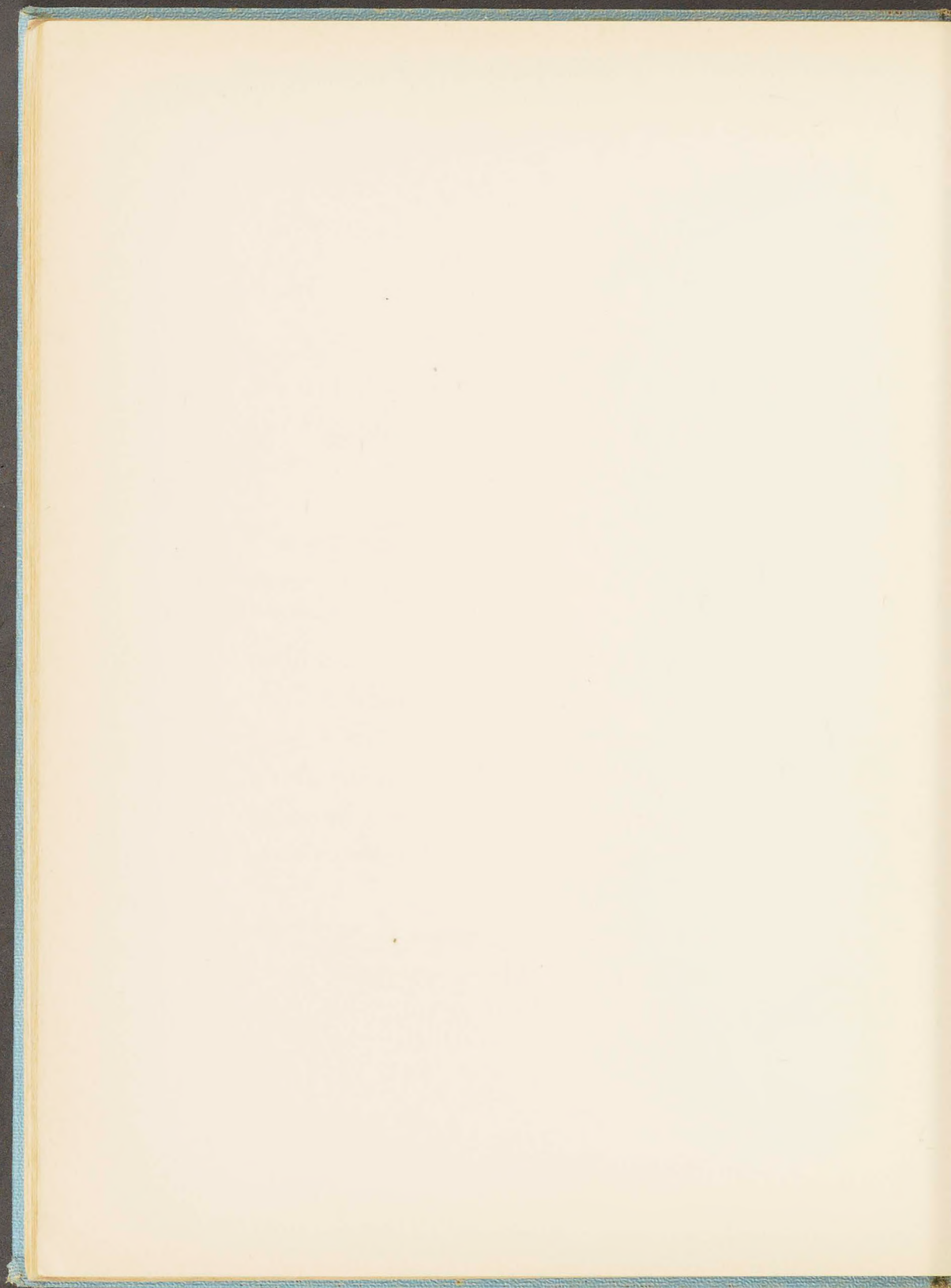


FLYING THINGS

Birds have wings—and butterflies!
So have bugs and bees!
Have you ever heard of earrings
That flew up in the trees?

Have you known of pigeon-wings
Fried crisp and brown and sweet,
To leave the dish they lie upon
And run on nimble feet?





VII

EARRINGS UP IN THE TREES

CONCETTA ran as fast as the wind to the *padrone's* garden. She stumbled over her own bare feet in haste to climb the steps that led to the court.

"*Cattivo!* You are stiff like brown boots!" wailed the little girl, as she limped into the quiet garden.

The apricot-trees shook their leaves and blossoms as though they knew her errand. Concetta climbed upon the seat, and with a long stick, began to poke among the branches above her head, her sharp eyes peeping into the deep green mass of foliage to see if her treasures were hidden there.

"Earrings up in the tree, come down!" she called. "You cannot hide away from me." Then she poked the branches again.

The earrings did not come down. Again and again the little girl called. Still nothing came. At last in discouragement, she sat on the bench and wriggled her brown toes in the grasses.

"Perhaps those earrings have crept among the violets," said she hopefully. She knelt on the ground and with her two hands, dug deep among the grasses and flowers, expecting each moment to see the shining gold of her lost birthday present. But she saw nothing.

Concetta did not intend to leave the garden until she had captured the runaways. So she climbed once more on the seat, and coaxed in her chirping voice:

"Earrings! Earrings up in the tree, please come down!"

Then she waited as still as a mouse, expecting that those golden earrings would fly at once into her hands. The trees shook in the wind, and the blossoms made a little rustling sound. And that was all.

Ready to cry from her disappointment, the poor little girl crept from the bench. Just then

a stiff brown figure came into the garden. It was Ann.

She looked with surprise to see a little Sicilian child huddled in a small heap among the bushes. Concetta wiped her face with her *mantellina*. She did not want the strange girl to know that she was crying.

"What are you doing?" asked Ann sharply in Italian.

"My earrings flew away," murmured Concetta.

"Flew away!" Ann's thin hand stole into her deep pocket. Yes, they were there! She grew hot and red as she felt those small gold rings that she had wrapped in her handkerchief and hidden in the pocket of her frock.

"Peppe made them for my *giorno*." Concetta wanted her to know how lovely they were.

"They were all covered with coral roses."

"And you have lost them?" Ann spoke so low, with her eyes on the ground.

"Yes! Yes! They flew out of the shop when Peppe was not looking. We cannot find them.

I thought that they might have hidden in the apricot-trees," Concetta explained. "I called and they did not hear. Perhaps—" and the child caught the English girl's hand, "perhaps if you will help me call, they will hear you. I call this way."

Concetta sprang to her feet and running to the tree, she held out her hands, and piped loudly:

"Earrings up in the tree, come down!"

Then she added, "Nonna Giulia says that maybe a little angel carried them off, and he might bring them back in time for my *festa*. But I thought that I would look here just the same."

Ann stood first on one foot and then on the other. Her one hand held the handkerchief and its stolen trinkets. Her other hand she pressed against her ashamed little heart. She wished that Concetta would go away. She wished that Concetta would not speak in such a sweet, coaxing voice. She wished—oh! how she wished—that she had never seen those earrings.



“‘EARRINGS, COME DOWN!’”

"Will you help me call them?" Concetta asked.

"No! I wont!" cried the little English girl, and ran half-crying into the hotel.

Such rudeness was strange and dreadful to Concetta. She pulled her *mantellina* close to her face, and crept out of the *padrone's* garden.

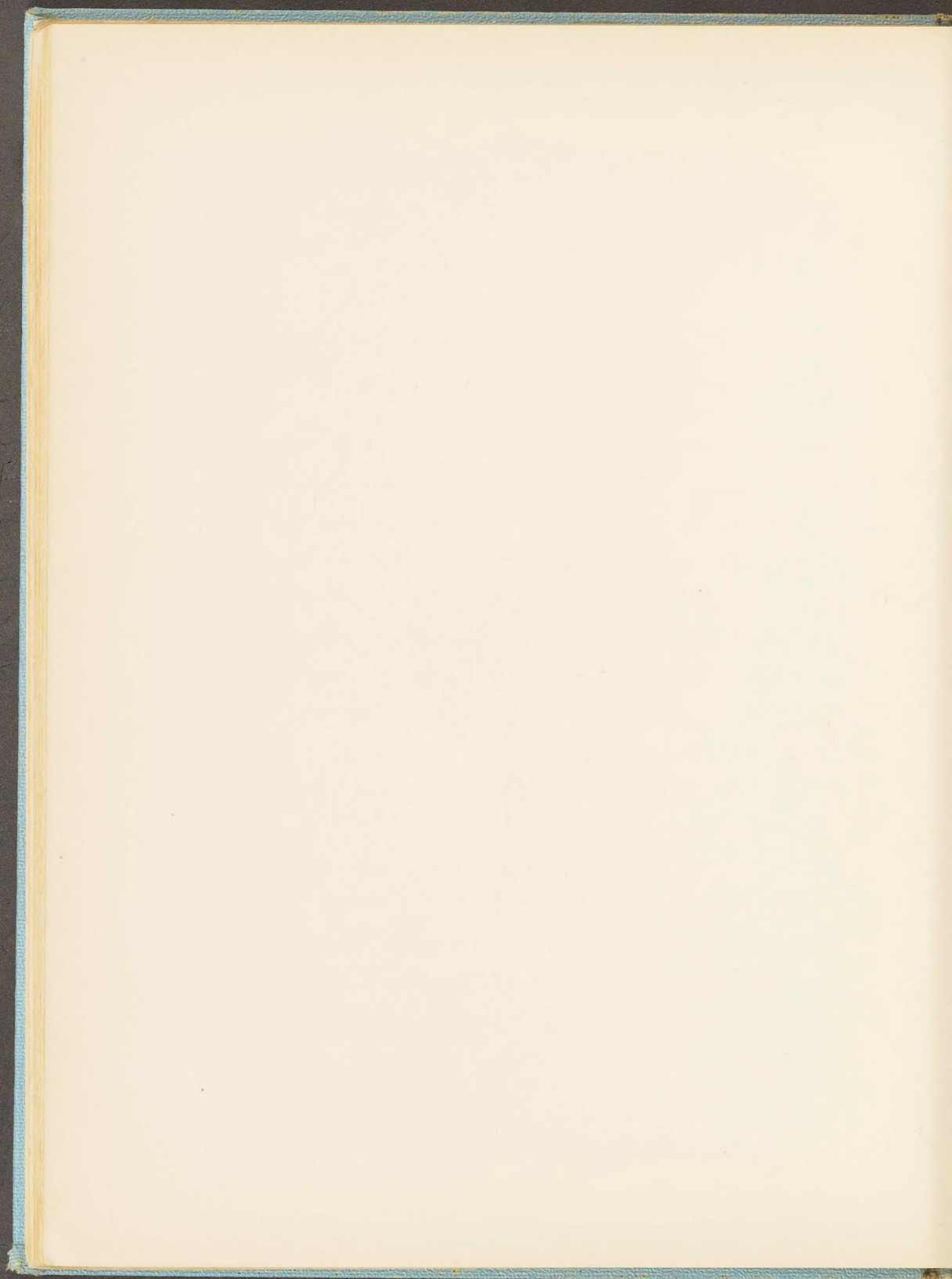


A WICKED HEART

Bricks and stones are heavy ;
Oh, many a pound they weigh !
But a heart that does a dreadful deed
Is heavier far than they.

Oh, darkly sails an iron boat ;
Stands dark the pine-tree tall !
But a heart that does a fearful thing
Is darker far than all.





VIII

EARRINGS AS HEAVY AS STONES

ANN stood alone on the balcony of the Hotel Vittoria. Her eyes were fixed on the long terraces that were pink with blossoming almond-trees and deep green with the leaves of the orange- and lemon-groves that stretched down—down to the blue Ionian sea. The skies were blue and rosy-gold, and the air was filled with the rustling of leaves and the fluttering of birds' wings.

But all this loveliness did not cheer the little English girl.

The stolen earrings, that were really as light as feathers, seemed to weigh like a stone in her pocket. And her heart was heavier still. She could not forget the little Sicilian girl. Her red button mouth drooping from sadness, her pip-

ing, coaxing voice, her dark fluttering eyes, were the things that filled Ann's mind.

But what hurt more than all else was that she knew she had done a dreadful thing.

"I am a thief! Just a thief!" she kept on saying to herself.

She did not believe that she could possibly live any longer with those golden trinkets in her pocket.

"If the sea were nearer I would throw them in," she thought.

But how unhappy the Sicilian child would be if her pretty coral moons were to be lost in the water forever! No, she would not throw them away.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she said.

Ann thought that she had just whispered this to herself. Yet she had spoken aloud. Her voice, though low, was filled with so much pain that her mother, who had come onto the balcony, heard and was startled by the miserable little sound.

"What is the trouble, Ann?" she asked.

Ann stood straight and stiff, and, turning her small white face, she whispered:

"Mamma, today is the Sicilian child's birthday and . . . and . . . I have stolen her earrings!"

She had confessed the terrible secret, and her heart did not hurt so badly.

Quietly the mother listened to the story told in a broken, low way. And after tired Ann had showed her the trinkets tied in her handkerchief, she answered gravely:

"You have done a sad and very wicked thing, Ann. But I know you will never do so again. I am glad that you told me. But that is not enough." She arose from her chair and took up Ann's little round hat and gave it to her. "There—go back to the jewel-shop and give the little girl her earrings."

The English girl, in her heavy brown boots, walked bravely through the *padrone's* garden. She ran quickly past the apricot-trees, for all the leaves seemed to call to her:

"Earrings up in the trees! Earrings up in the trees!"

"I am taking them back!" Ann answered, and ran out into the street.

She started down the street toward the jewel-shop, going like the wind. Her brown boots against the stones sounded with a deep noise, *zum, zum, zum*; and the earrings in her pocket weighed as heavily as a stone.

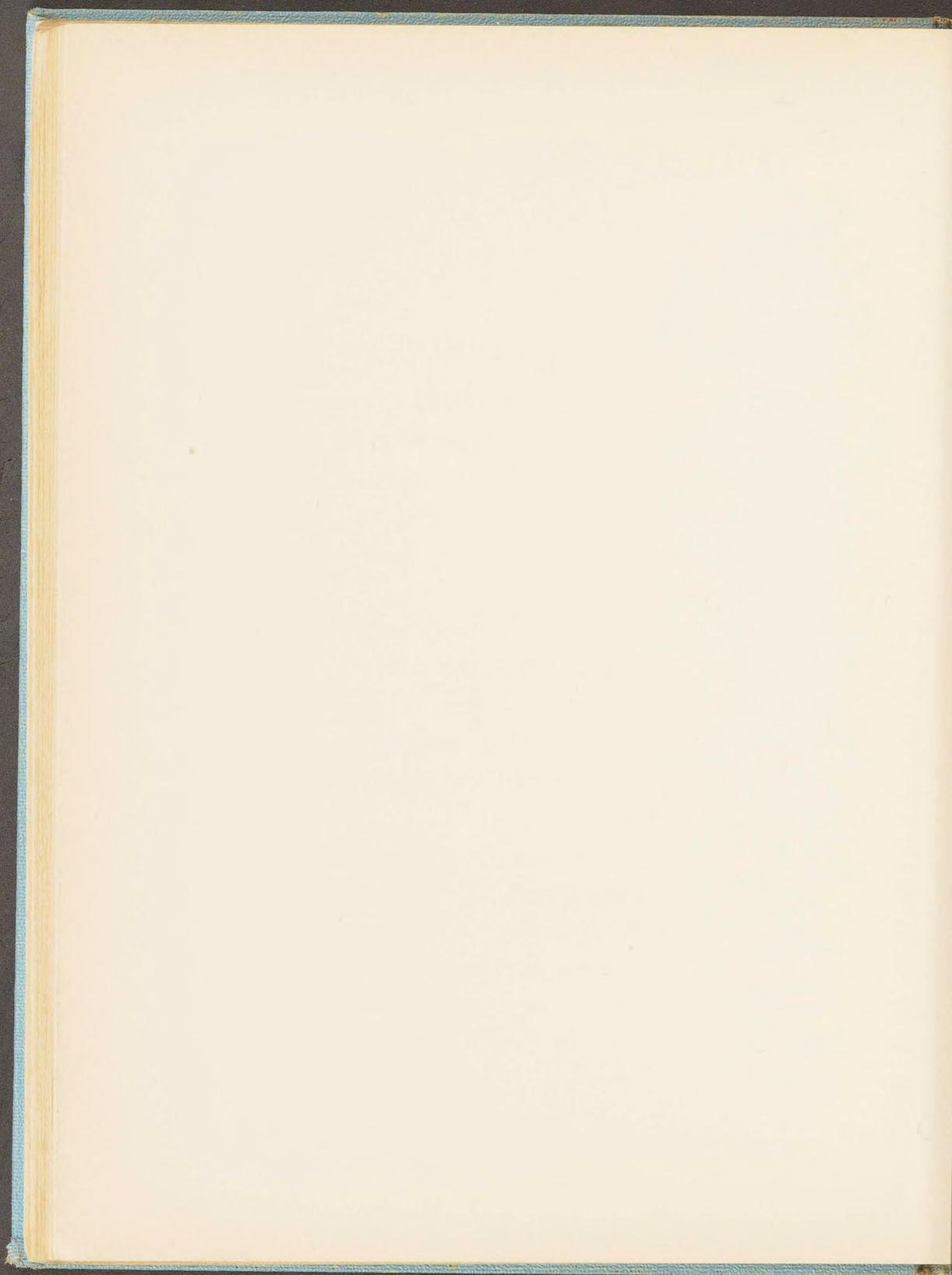


BIRTHDAYS

There is a day in every year
That just belongs to you.
'Tis not Easter with its lilies,
'Tis not Christmas blessed and true.

It is the day when first you came
To earth a baby new.
Oh, ring the bells for birthdays!
And give of presents gay,
To every child in every land,
To celebrate her day!





IX

THE BIRTHDAY SUPPER

CONCETTA sat on the broad counter in the shop, in a state of perfect rapture. She clapped her chubby hands against each other as she listened to the bustling and humming noises that came from behind the closed doors of the next room.

She was waiting for the birthday supper, and it seemed an uncommonly long wait, for the sweet odors of fried pigeon and all the good foods that Nonna Giulia had prepared, were creeping from the cracks of the door into the shop.

At last the door opened, and Mastro Innocenti appeared on the threshold.

"Come, my bird!" he cried.

Concetta jumped from her perch and skipped eagerly toward him.

"The *festa* is ready, Padre?" she whispered as he led her into the feast, her nimble feet dancing and her *mantellina* bobbing up and down in excitement.

And such a birthday supper it was!

The table, covered with a blue cloth, was simply heaped with delightful things. A platter filled with fried pigeons, whose legs and wings and fat breasts were golden-brown like autumn leaves, was placed in the middle of the board. All around it were set bowls and dishes of fruits—melons, ripe figs, pears as large as melons, rosy red apples, and golden oranges. On another platter were the jelly-rolls, dripping with sweetness, which the *padrone* had made in his own kitchen in the Hotel Vittoria. And nestling among all these were bouquets of crinkly parsley and long white violets.

Nonna Giulia, with a ladle in her hand, smiled happily. Peppe, his arms filled with parcels, and Beppo, and the *padrone*, holding his dear flute, were gathered to greet the birthday child.

“Uno! due! tre! quattro! cinque! sei! sette! otto! Evviva Corallina!” called Peppe.

And the party began.

Concetta sat in the seat of honor by her father. She nibbled the pigeon wings and sipped the sticky sweet *isola*, which she loved so dearly. Constantly she would poke and pat the small bundles wrapped in bright paper, which were piled near her plate.

“Padre, may I open them now?” she asked at last.

“*Ecco!* This is the time to open those presents!” replied Mastro Innocenti.

Away flew the strings! Off came the papers! There were the gifts!

Was there ever another child that had such good fortune? Concetta caressed each one with starry eyes. She loved best the coral-colored *mantellina* that had come from the shop in Messina. It was a lovely red, and bordered with bright green leaves and white roses. Nonna Giulia had made her a little crocheted apron. Beppo had cut a wooden doll from the olive-

tree and had gaily painted it a coral-red. They were so lovely, those presents, that she had forgotten the runaway earrings. Such dear presents! and she huddled them to her.

With wonder and delight the little girl ate the *pasticioti*, while with the other hand she held fast to the new bright shawl.

Every one was merry and gay. Nonna Giulia had not a moment to sit, so busy she was in helping others. The *padrone* and Mastro Innocenti joked and questioned one another of the year's trade, of the poverty of the homes in Mola, perched lonely and high on its lofty castle-rock. Beppo and Peppe were so occupied with the fruits and sweet-cakes that they had no time to say a word.

Then into this merry-making came a stiff, brown little figure that stood in the doorway and held out a hand in which shone a pair of golden earrings. It was Ann!



A HAPPY HEART

The singing thrush is happy!
The flower of spring is gay!
But the heart that does a noble thing,
Is happier far than they.

Oh, bright the happy yellow sun!
And bright the lamb at play!
But the heart that does a worthy deed,
Is brighter far than they.





"ANN STOOD WITH THE TRINKETS IN HER HAND"

X

THE SURPRISE COMES HOME

EVERY one in the room looked with amazement at the little English girl. No one spoke, and Ann stood stiff and quiet with the trinkets in her hand. Her face grew white and her heart shook like a leaf in the storm.

"*Padre!* it is the English girl," Concetta whispered.

"I have brought them back—her—earrings—I—took—them!"

As she waited in the still room, with all those dark eyes fixed on her, Ann forgot to be straight and dignified. Not knowing where to hide from shame, she covered her burning face with her hands, and began to cry.

At once Nonna Giulia was holding her in her old arms.

"*Poverella!*" murmured the old grandmother

soothingly. "But you brought them back. And we shall forget that they ever flew away."

Ann sobbed in a pitiful voice that could scarcely be heard, "I am sorry! I am sorry!"

Peppe darted forward and took the earrings.

"Corallina!" he shouted, "here they are! The surprise!" And he immediately fastened them on Concetta's small ears.

And Concetta? Concetta's happiness was complete. She pattered the earrings with her light fingers, and bobbed her curls up and down to hear the coral tinkling against the gold. Then, like a bird, she flew across the room and held up her red-coral button mouth to kiss the little stranger.

"Did the angel tell you to bring them back for my *festa*?" she cried.

"*Bravo! Bravo!*" exclaimed Mastro Innocenti.

"*Va bene! Va bene!*" murmured the *padrone*.

Concetta could not bear to have any one sad and down-cast on her *giorno*. She took Ann's hand and led her to the great chest.

"Sit there! And you may look at my other surprises," she said.

Then, with a dish of *pasticioti* in one hand and her presents in the other, she climbed on the seat beside Ann.

There was no place for tears in such a happy home!

Every one was gay and glad. Nonna Giulia scurried about to put away the last of the birthday supper. The *padrone* and Mastro Innocenti sat and talked of their boyhood days in Messina. Beppo piped on his uncle's flute, while Peppe whistled and sang an accompaniment. Concetta and Ann were perched on the painted chest with the playthings beside them. The English girl's smooth braids were completely hidden by the coral-red *mantellina* which decked her head, and a-top of Corallina's dark curls was the round straw hat!

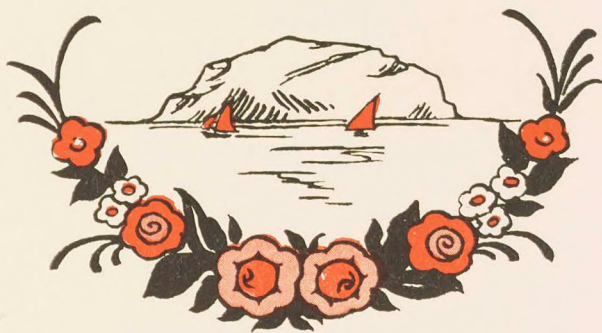
There they sat—as bright as larks in the morning—the happiest little girls in Taormina-on-the-Hills.

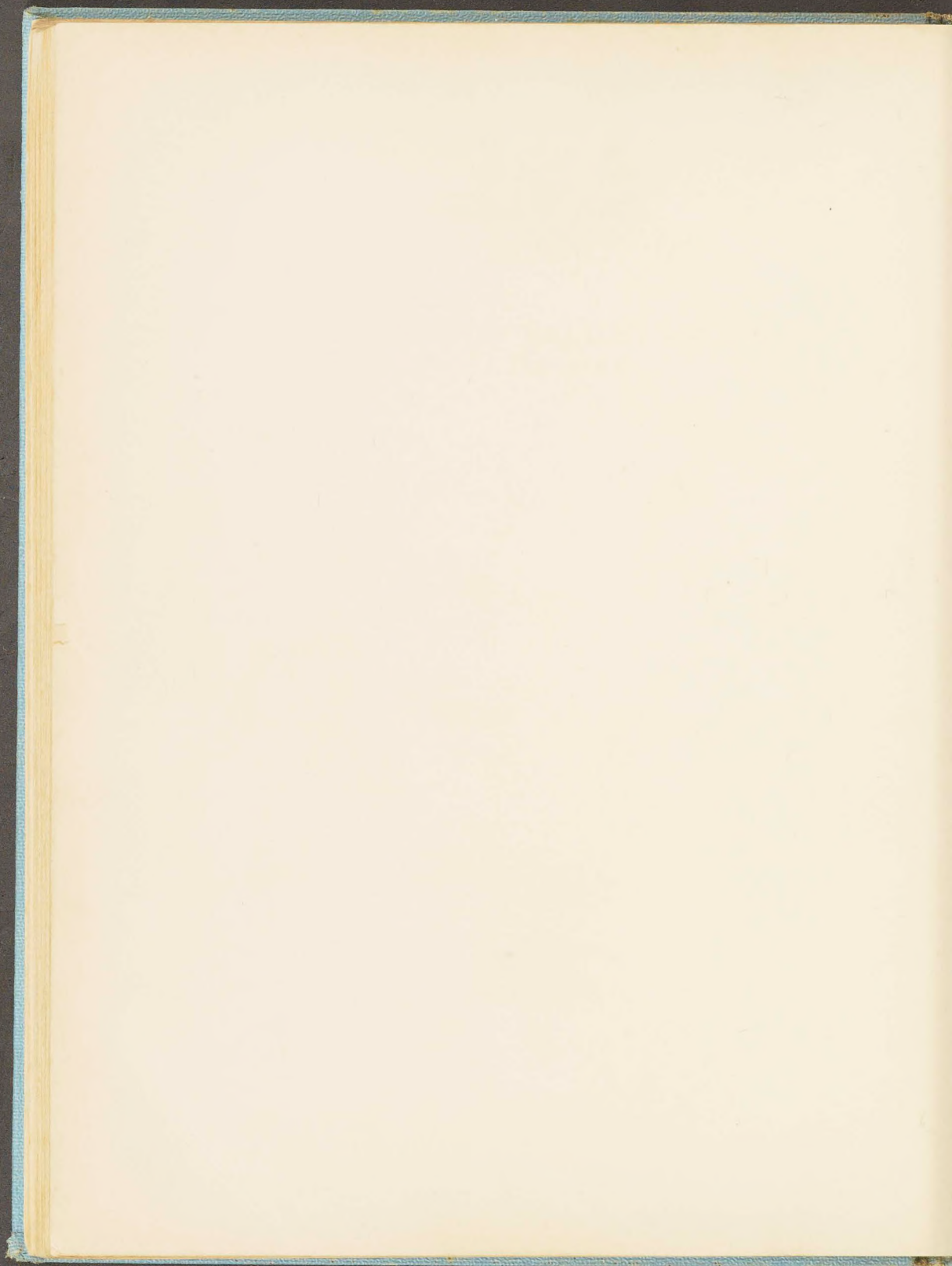




ADDIO!

With blossoms! With bird-song!
Beneath a violet sky,
At night-time! At sunset!
We bid you all good-by,
And leave within a crystal sea,
The Coral Isle of Sicily.







WHAT THE ITALIAN WORDS IN THIS BOOK MEAN

<i>Addio</i>	Good-by.
<i>Bambina</i>	Child.
<i>Bambola</i>	Doll.
<i>Bene!</i>	Good!
<i>Bravo!</i>	Fine!
<i>Buono giorno</i>	Good day.
<i>Cara mia</i>	My dear.
<i>Carissimo</i>	My dearest one.
<i>Carozza</i>	Carriage.
<i>Cattivo</i>	Bad.
<i>Certamente</i>	Certainly.
<i>Ecco!</i>	Behold!
<i>Evviva!</i>	Long live!
<i>Fascia</i>	Swaddling-bands.
<i>Festa</i>	Feast.
<i>Giorno</i>	Birthday.
<i>Isola</i>	A sweet wine-like drink.





<i>Lire</i>	Italian money.
<i>Maccheroni</i>	Macaroni
<i>Mantellina</i>	Shawl or small cape.
<i>Mastro</i>	Master
<i>Nonna</i>	Grandmother.
<i>Padre</i>	Father.
<i>Padrone</i>	Landlord.
<i>Pasta</i>	All kinds of paste foods, as macaroni, spaghetti, ravioli, etc.
<i>Pasticioti</i>	Little cakes made with white cheese.
<i>Piazza</i>	A square.
<i>Prezioso mio</i>	My precious.
<i>Poverella</i>	Poor little one.
<i>Senapismo</i>	Poultice.
<i>Va Bene!</i>	Well done!
<i>Uno, due, tre</i>	One, two, three.
<i>Quattro</i>	Four.
<i>Cinque</i>	Five.
<i>Sei, sette, otto</i>	Six, seven, eight.





V70
1.7





